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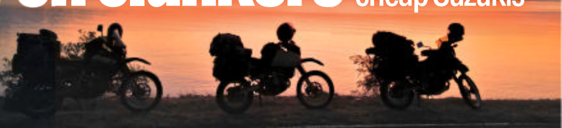

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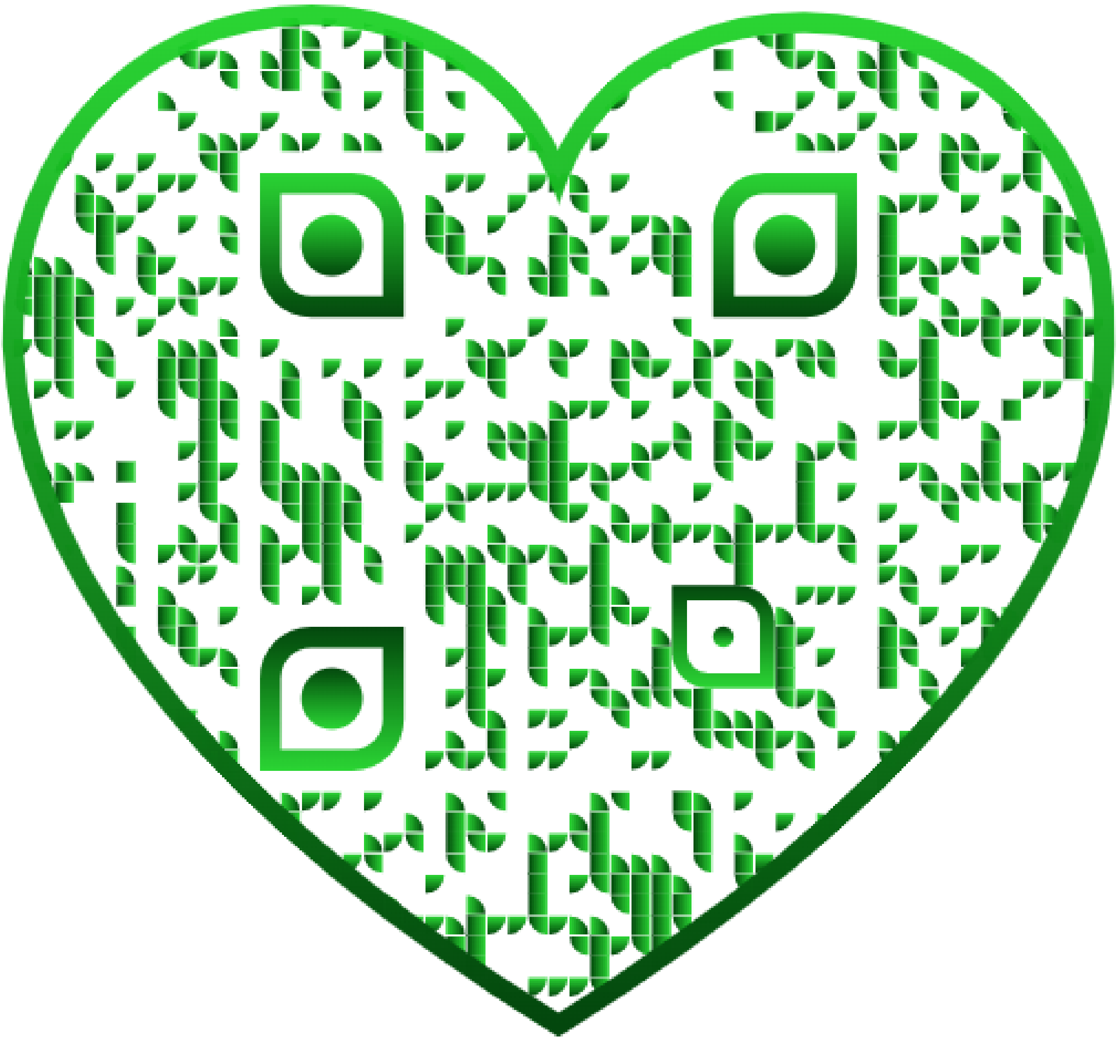

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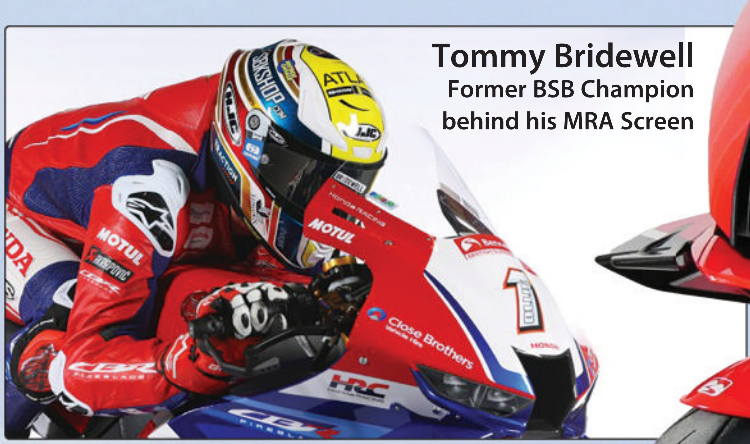

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behind his MRA Screen

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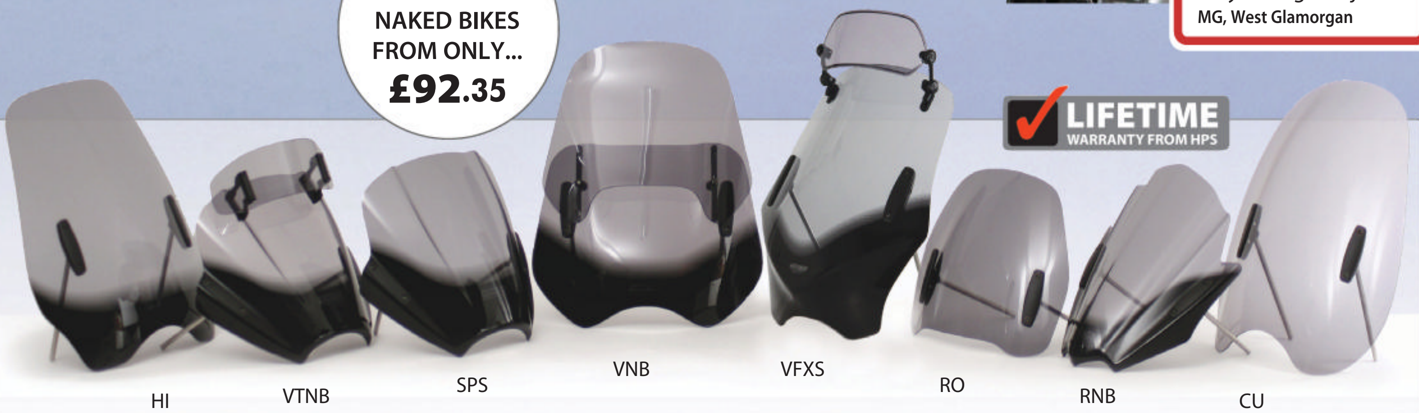

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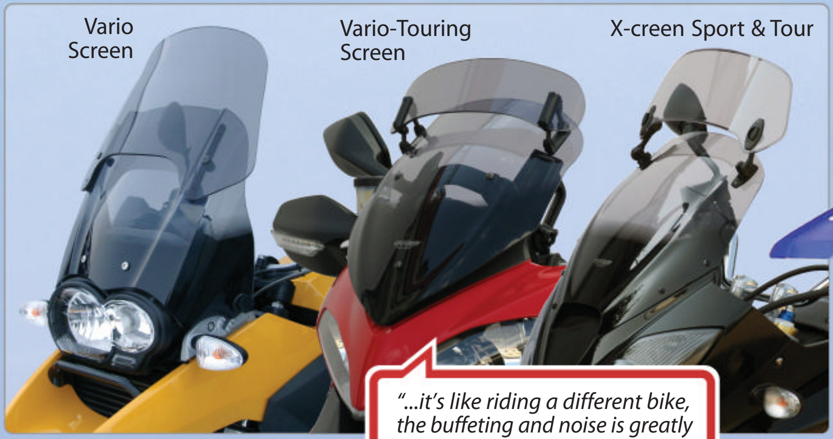

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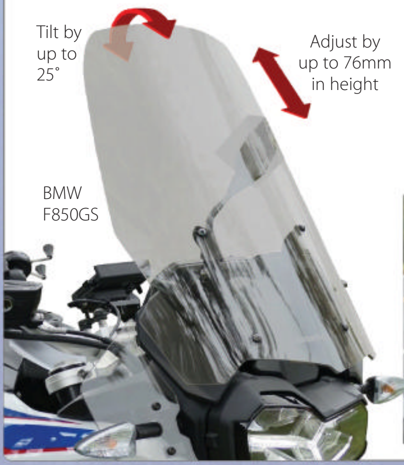

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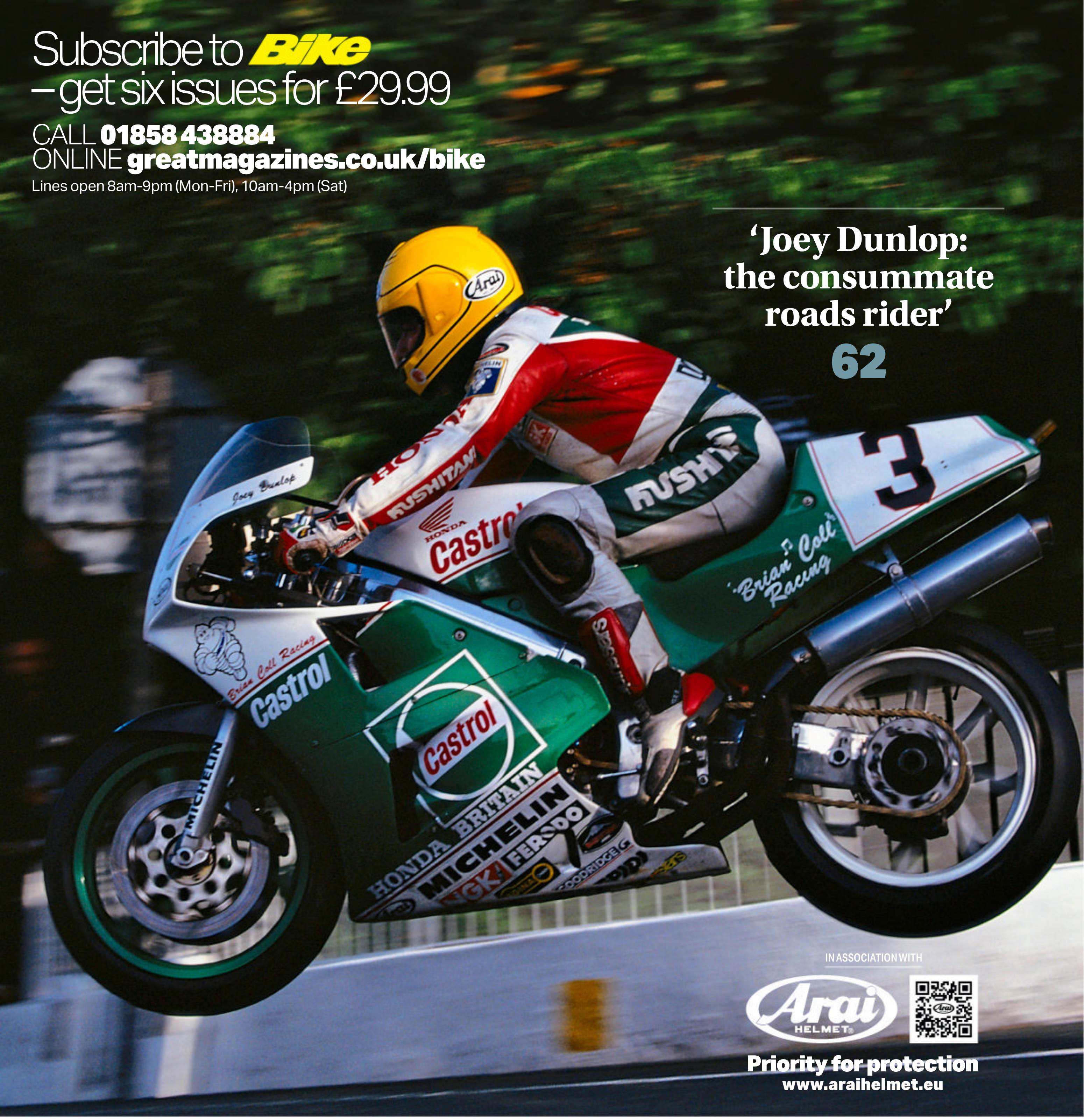

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‘Joey Dunlop: the consummate roads rider’

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Why fly from Oz to London when bikes exist?

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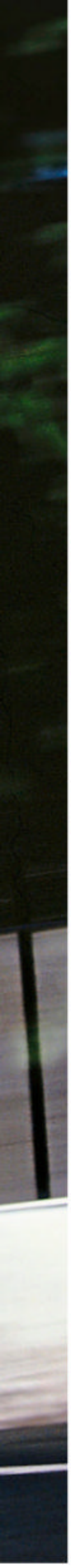

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Hello

Bike
Issue 629 August 2025
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Estrella Galicia
0,0

PIC: MIKE ARMITAGE

Blurry Moto2 caught by bloke with a camera

It's really quite remarkable that the TT is still such a Big Thing. It hasn't been part of the world championship for truly yonks – it's not been in the Grand Prix circus for almost 50 years and the Formula TT classes disappeared at the start of the 1990s – and yet for two weeks every year the Isle of Man is the centre of the motorcycling universe. It attracts riders, teams, helpers, volunteers and spectators from around the globe. And thanks to the recent increase in coverage and access, it can be watched by more people than ever.

This issue we've been deep inside the paddock, squirrelled our way into the teams and prodded the people who make it such a magical event to create this special TT edition. You'll find big stories and great pictures from this year's racing, untold tales from the event's amazing history, and no shortage of heroes. I hope you enjoy it. (*Bike* went to press at the start of race week, so apologies if we've missed something.)

There was another big race in May. The MotoGP series came to the UK, and so I headed to Silverstone with a gangly teenager in tow. Not wanting to get caught in the massive queues and keen to find a decent viewing spot, we set off nice and early… and breezed straight in. We could also stand and sit pretty much where we fancied – or we could have if there'd been a handy bit of spectator banking around Village, The Loop, Aintree and the Wellington Straight, rather than a road and hoarding. I know that Silverstone is vast and makes a big crown look small, but it was hard not to feel it was a bit… well, quiet and disappointing.

And then the bikes came out. First of all we were treated to an engaging Moto2 race, during which I managed to take some not-entirely-rubbish photos. And then MotoGP rolled out. The noise, speed, closeness, skill and sheer violence were amazing – and being in a crowd giving it plenty of 'oohs' and 'aahs' during the action-packed race felt special. They were too fast for my poor camera skills, but I did get a sunburned face. I know it's hideously expensive, and I know Silverstone isn't the best for viewing – but if you can go next year, you really should.

Enjoy the issue.

Mike Armitage
Editor

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Team Bike

This magazine is made by the most talented team of bike journalists, writers and photographers in the universe. Here's what they've been doing this month.

What the TT does to your engine
Tech

1

Jamie Turner

Our tame professor of engines has dug into the BMW M1000RR specs and explored what the engine goes through during a hot TT lap. It's mind-bending stuff that you can only read in *Bike*.

Tech, page 26

How Honda ruled the Island

2

John Westlake

The real story behind Honda's love affair with the TT is remarkable – and you won't have heard it before. John's delve into the history is a feast of eye-opening detail and truly fabulous facts.

Honda at the TT, page 42

Inside the TT paddock

3

Dan Sutherland

Dan's day job is news editor for *MCN*. This means he knows how to unearth proper stories – so we kidnapped him and sent him to the TT paddock. It's full of great tales and amazing people.

Inside the TT, page 56

'HE WAS A MAN OF TRUTH'

4

Mark Graham

There was no one like Joey Dunlop, and there's no one who writes quite like MG. His look back at Yer Maun a quarter of a century after his passing is a rather splendid thing indeed.

Joey tribute, page 62

STREETFIGHTING YEARS

5

Simon Hargreaves

UK's most experienced tester? Possibly. Si's ridden every bike that matters in the past 30 years and isn't scared of his opinion, so was the bloke to find the truth about Ducati's new V-twin.

Streetfighting years, page 100

'It's not as bad as it looks...'
Racing
IRCUIT PAUL RICARD

6

Ian Martin

Hard-working, ever-trying, always-chirpy driving force behind Team Bike and their classic endurance efforts. Quite how he manages to force a smile after what happened at Paul Ricard is remarkable.

Racing, page 128

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5 BIKES THAT REALLY MATTER THIS MONTH

Quartararo took pole at the British GP – his third in a row

This is where the M1 shines: braking hard into corners

ENGINE
The only inline four-cylinder engine on the grid and not as powerful as the Ducati. Massimo says Yamaha have been working on a new engine (we assume a V4 like everyone else) for two years but it hasn't been tested by the GP riders yet.

CHASSIS
Aluminium Deltabox with fully adjustable geometry. Swingarm is a mix of aluminium and carbon and has changed since the beginning of the season. The bike's total weight is on the class minimum of 157kg.

ELECTRONICS
Difficult to know what they've done here, but the M1 is definitely getting out of corners better than last year.

Seismic changes have been occurring within the Yamaha MotoGP team over the past few years, according to team director Massimo Meregalli – and they've catapulted Yamaha back to the sharp end of MotoGP.

'In the past the Japanese [at the Yamaha factory] were perhaps just hearing us without really listening,' Meregalli tells *Bike*. 'Now there is much more collaboration and trust between Japan and Europe [Yamaha's MotoGP base is in Italy]. In the past, the information only flowed one way, which used to be fruitful in the past, but not anymore.

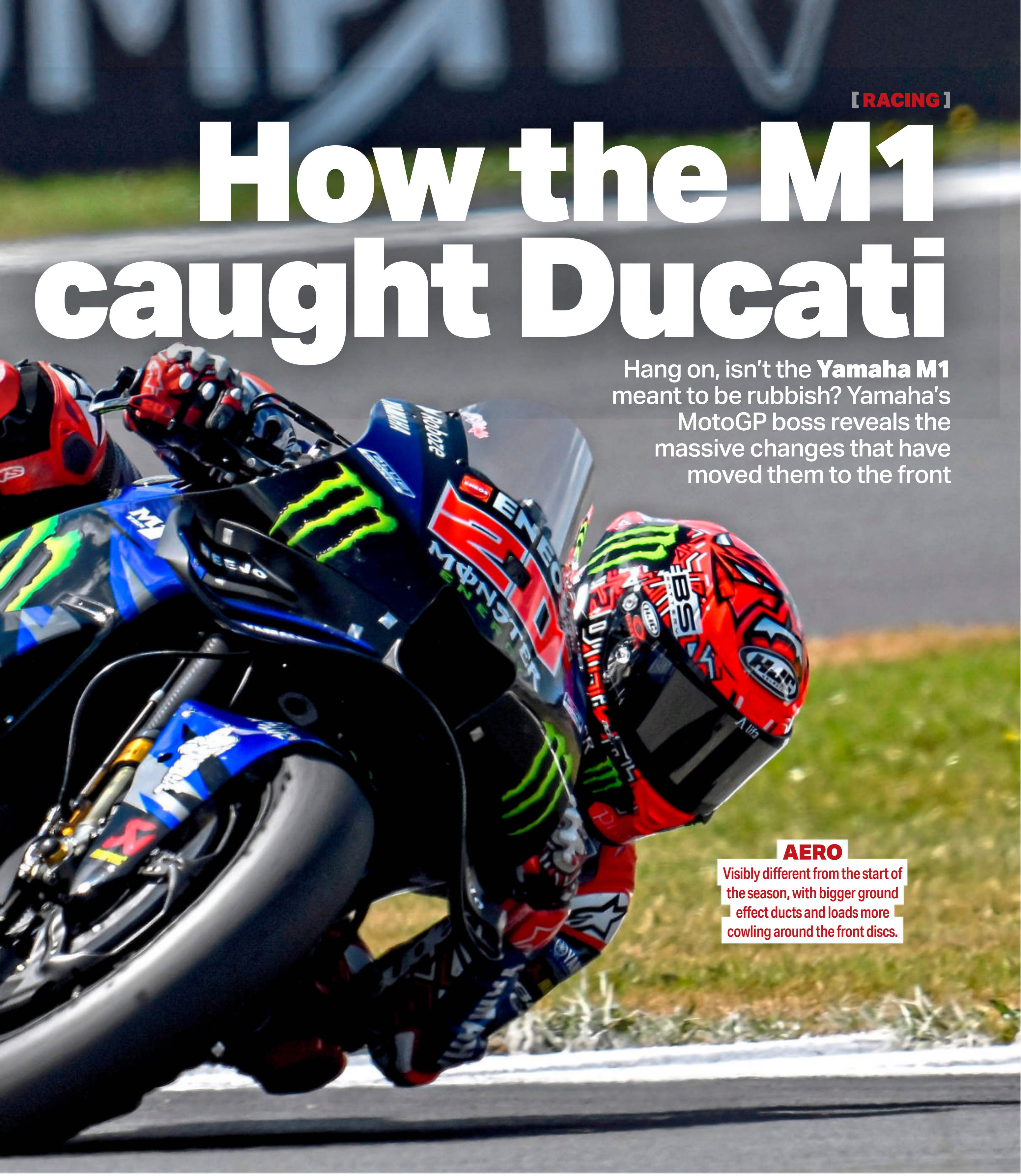
'We knew that if we could put together our brave and fast European way of working with the Japanese methodology, that would be a win-win. And now we are seeing the benefits. I think this is also what is happening at Honda – they are also working with more Europeans and building a racing base in Europe.'

Yamaha have also employed several Ducati race engineers. 'Max Bartolini [who joined Yamaha in 2024 after 20 years at Ducati] has been fantastic for us,' says Meregalli. 'And in the Pramac team we acquired a new crew chief and data engineer with different experiences – they've made a big difference, too.'

PICS: YAMAHA

How the M1 caught Ducati

Hang on, isn't the **Yamaha M1** meant to be rubbish? Yamaha's MotoGP boss reveals the massive changes that have moved them to the front



AERO
Visibly different from the start of the season, with bigger ground effect ducts and loads more cowling around the front discs.

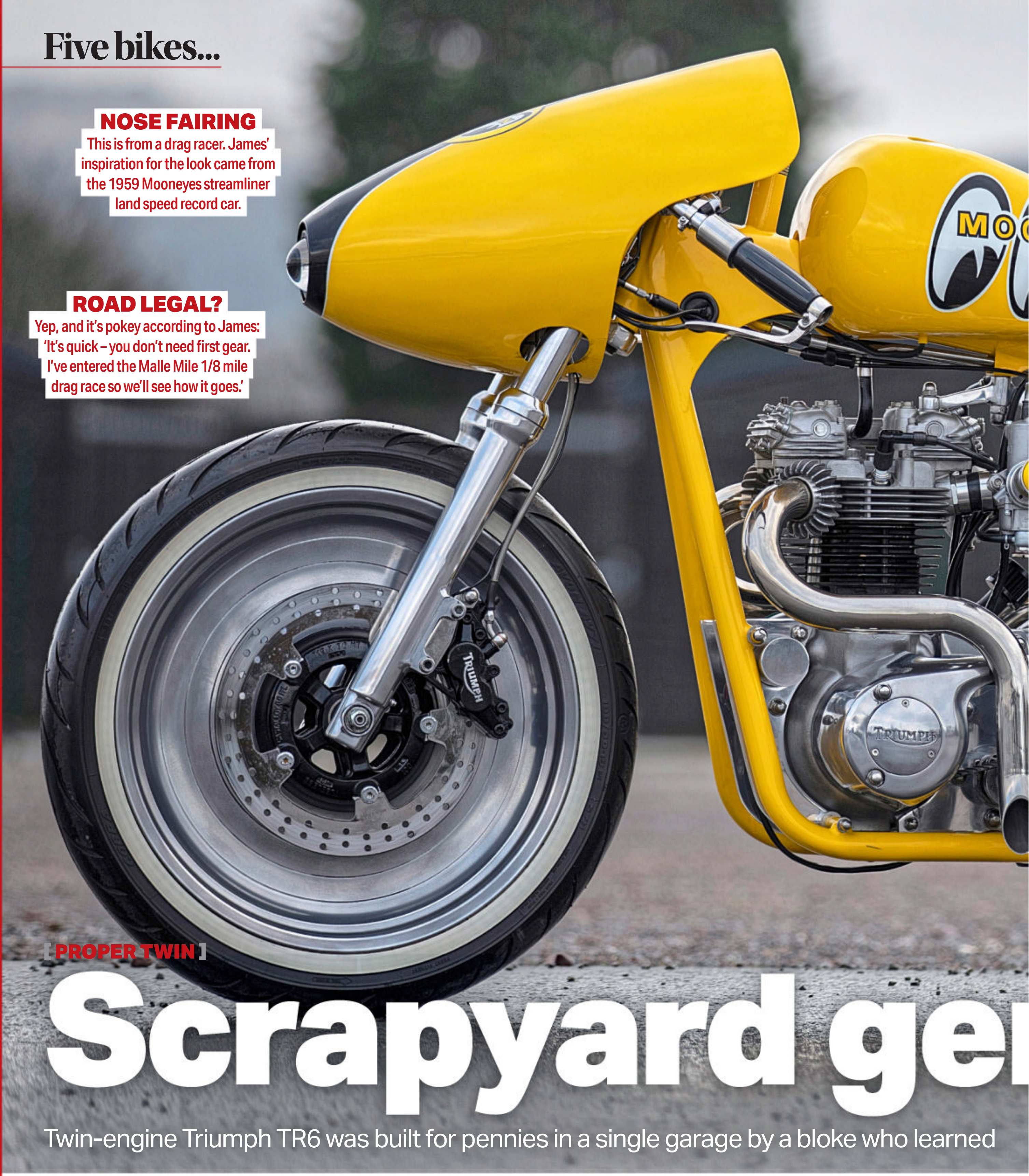
The results are astonishing. At the British GP Fabio Quartararo took his third straight pole position and was leading by five seconds when the rear ride height adjuster stuck in the down position at over half distance, forcing him to retire.

'The increase in speed and performance is coming from a lot of hard work in a lot of areas,' says Meregalli. 'The chassis, engine, electronics and aero have all been improved but there is not a single area where we've made a big step.'

Yamaha are also being helped by MotoGP's concession rules, which allow struggling teams to test more and update more parts mid-season. 'This helps us but it makes life harder because it's a lot of additional work,' says Meregalli.

'For example, we had a test in Misano after the Le Mans GP – we spent two days working on new components. We were able to homologate the second aero package for Fabio – he liked it and the data was positive so we immediately introduced the parts [for the British GP]. We did the same in Jerez – we tested one new engine specification and introduced it in Le Mans.

'In the past we would have never been able to do something like that because all the riders would have had to test it.'



NOSE FAIRING
This is from a drag racer. James' inspiration for the look came from the 1959 Mooneyes streamliner land speed record car.

ROAD LEGAL?
Yep, and it's pokey according to James: 'It's quick – you don't need first gear. I've entered the Malle Mile 1/8 mile drag race so we'll see how it goes.'

[PROPER TWIN]

Scrapyard ge

Twin-engine Triumph TR6 was built for pennies in a single garage by a bloke who learned

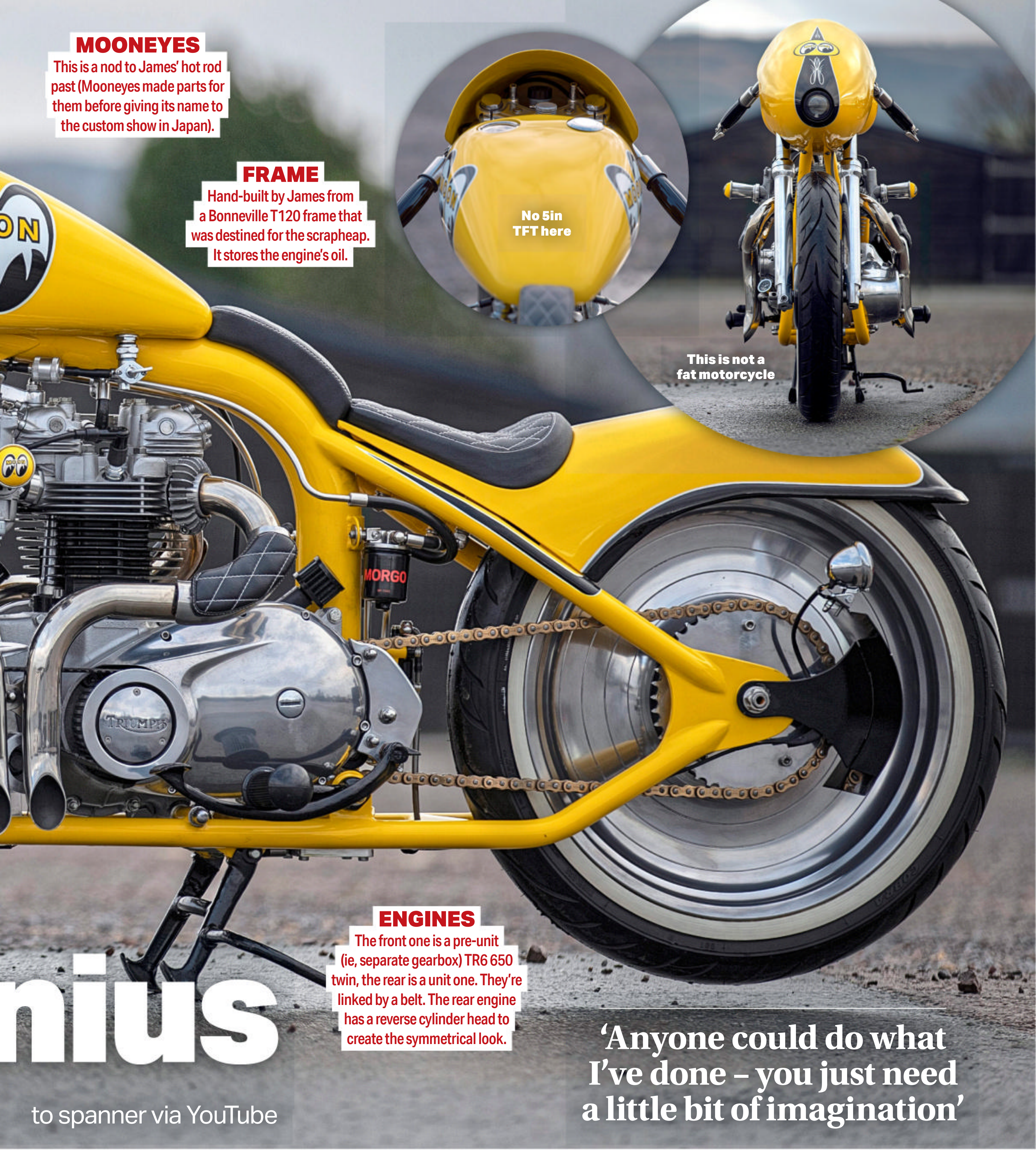
Twin-engined bikes are usually undertaken by vastly experienced professional custom builders who want to push their skills to the limit. Not this one. It was built by amateur tinkerer James Rogers in his spare time, looking at YouTube videos when he got stuck.

'My engine-building skills aren't great,' he tells *Bike*. 'I had rebuilt VW engines and a Rover V8 from my hot rod, but I only started building Triumphs a few years ago – I watched some videos on YouTube to find out what to do. There's nothing to it – they're so basic.'

Sensing our scepticism, James attempts to prove his point. 'Take the reverse cylinder head,' he says, referring to the rear engine that has its exhausts exiting to the rear. 'I'd seen in a magazine that it was possible, so I looked on the internet how to do it – it's just undoing six bolts and turning it round. It's as easy as that.' Except of course you also have to retime the cam phasing because everything is back to front…

Then there's the fact that James has done it on a tiny budget. He started with two sets of engine cases that were hanging from his garage wall because they were cracked. One set of cases was from a pre-unit TR6 – ie, it had a separate gearbox – and the other was from a later unit engine. 'I wondered if anyone had done a twin-engine bike using a pre-unit and unit engine, and it turned out no one has. So it had to be done.'

PICS: DEL HICKEY



MOONEYES
This is a nod to James' hot rod past (Mooneyes made parts for them before giving its name to the custom show in Japan).

FRAME
Hand-built by James from a Bonneville T120 frame that was destined for the scrapheap. It stores the engine's oil.

No 5in TFT here

This is not a fat motorcycle

ENGINES
The front one is a pre-unit (ie, separate gearbox) TR6 650 twin, the rear is a unit one. They're linked by a belt. The rear engine has a reverse cylinder head to create the symmetrical look.

nius

to spanner via YouTube

> 'Anyone could do what I've done – you just need a little bit of imagination'

James collected parts from some of his classic-riding mates, then discovered one of them was chucking out a classic Bonneville T120 frame because the downtube was bent. 'Then I got a tank and mudguard out of the scrap bin at my local Harley dealership, and in the back of the shop I noticed they had some V-Rod wheels that had been replaced because moisture was getting under the lacquer,' he says. 'I paid a tenner each for them. It snowballed from there.'

The engines are linked by pulleys on the ends of the cranks, but how did he know how to do that? 'I was in a mate's garage and I saw he had two small-block Chevy water pump pulleys and thought they might work. It's as simple as that. I bought them for a fiver apiece.' They're tensioned by an Audi cambelt tensioner that James found – you guessed it – in a scrapyard. 'You stumble across stuff and make it work,' he says. 'You've just got to have a go.'

It did take him seven years, though. 'The hardest bit was getting the bike running – it just would not start. I'd bought brand new carbs from Amal and a brand new electronic ignition system from Tri-Spark, and spent ages trying to find the problem. I assumed I'd got the cam timing wrong. It was actually the new carb and the Tri-Spark – both had faults from new.

'But overall, anyone could do what I've done – you just need a little bit of imagination and to learn from your mistakes.'

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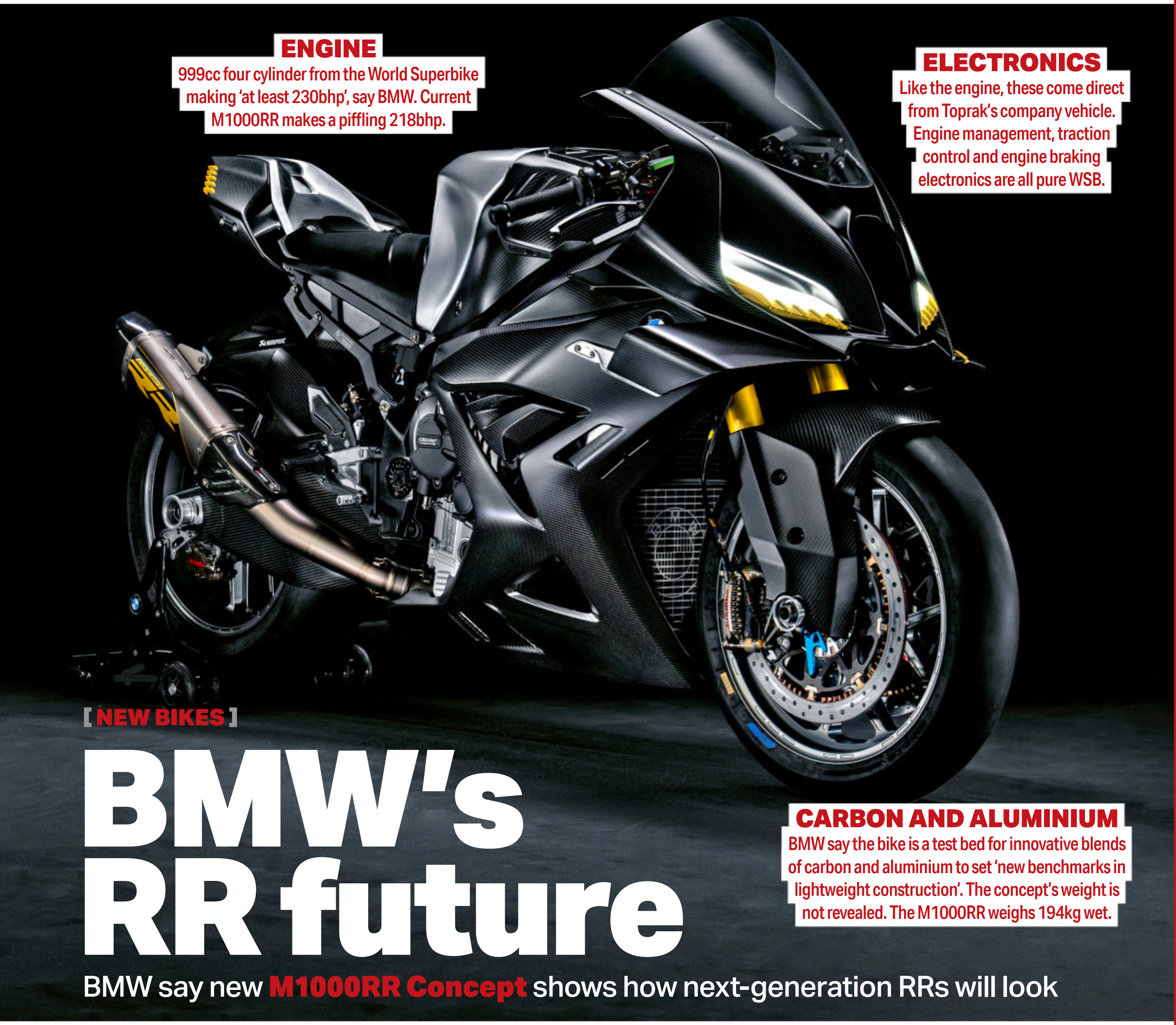


ENGINE
999cc four cylinder from the World Superbike making 'at least 230bhp', say BMW. Current M1000RR makes a piffling 218bhp.

ELECTRONICS
Like the engine, these come direct from Toprak's company vehicle. Engine management, traction control and engine braking electronics are all pure WSB.

CARBON AND ALUMINIUM
BMW say the bike is a test bed for innovative blends of carbon and aluminium to set 'new benchmarks in lightweight construction'. The concept's weight is not revealed. The M1000RR weighs 194kg wet.

[NEW BIKES]

BMW's RR future

BMW say new **M1000RR Concept** shows how next-generation RRs will look

If you want clues about the next S1000RR and M1000RRs, study this concept bike that BMW showed at a swanky custom show in Italy. 'Never before has BMW Motorrad provided such an early glimpse into a future generation of the RR models,' says BMW's motorcycle chief, Markus Flasch.

It's based around Toprak Razgatlioglu's all-conquering World Superbike – complete with a 230bhp motor according to BMW – but perhaps more interesting is the styling, which verges on subtle compared to the current M1000RR.

Instead of frontal wings almost as wide as the mirrors, the aero is less brutal, with far narrower wings and smaller but more numerous ducts – including on the nose, either side of the main air intake. BMW have also introduced ducts through the tail (as per the Panigale) and new slanty headlights reminiscent of the 2004 Fireblade. The new aero increases stability 'at very high speeds' and 'maximum cornering speeds', say BMW.

The bike was unveiled at the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este at Lake Como in Italy, where Flasch reiterated BMW's commitment to a sportsbike sector that is being abandoned by some Japanese manufacturers – Yamaha's R1 has gone track-only, and Suzuki's GSX-R1000 hasn't been available here in the UK since 2023.

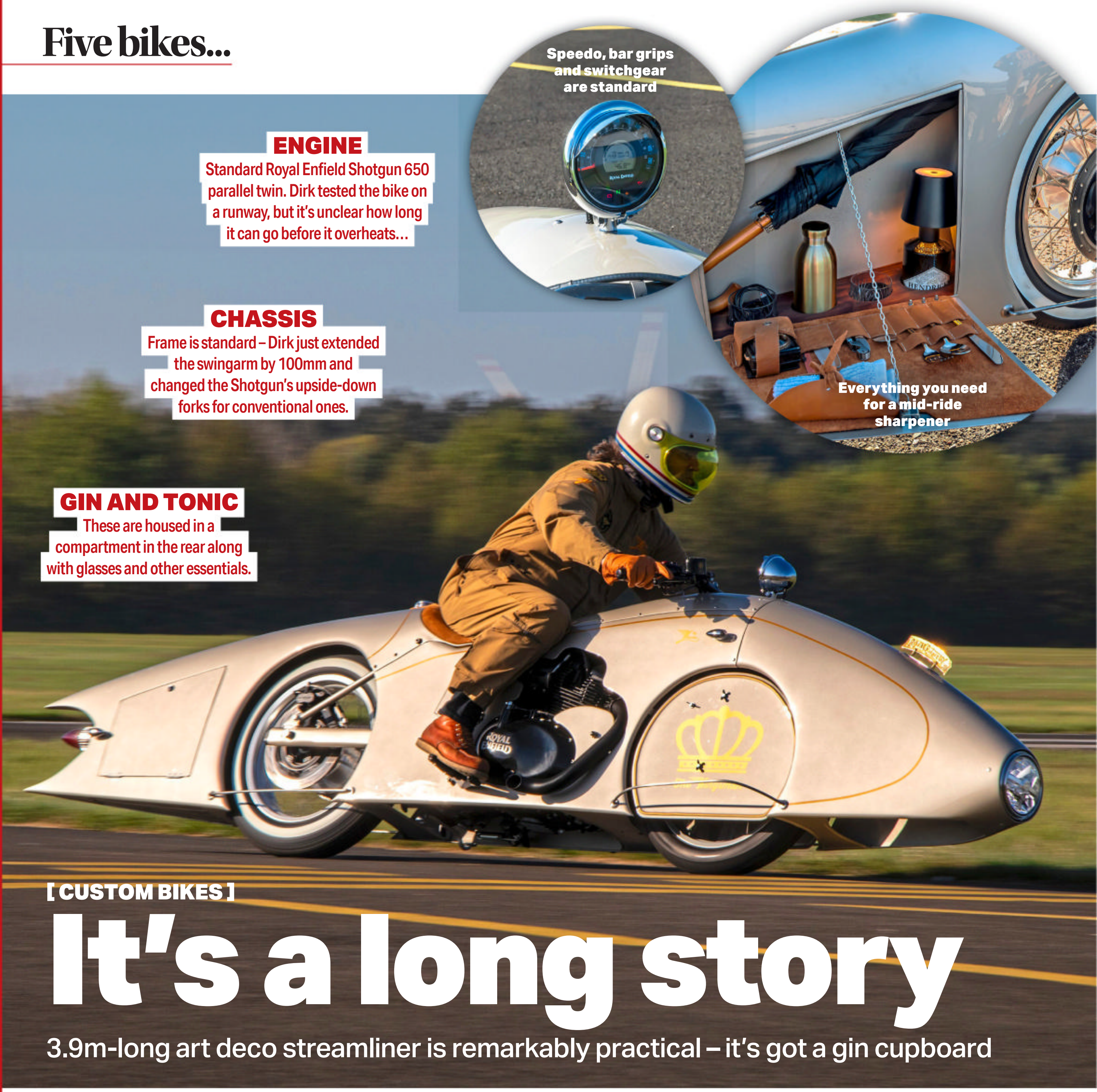
'This concept represents BMW's leadership claim to offer the highest engineering level and maximum performance in this segment,' says Flasch.

> **'Early glimpse into future generation of the RR models'**

Toprak's desk a rather nice place to be

Expect a holey tail unit with the next production RR

PICS: BMW



ENGINE
Standard Royal Enfield Shotgun 650 parallel twin. Dirk tested the bike on a runway, but it's unclear how long it can go before it overheats...

CHASSIS
Frame is standard – Dirk just extended the swingarm by 100mm and changed the Shotgun's upside-down forks for conventional ones.

GIN AND TONIC
These are housed in a compartment in the rear along with glasses and other essentials.

Speedo, bar grips and switchgear are standard

Everything you need for a mid-ride sharpener

[CUSTOM BIKES]

It's a long story

3.9m-long art deco streamliner is remarkably practical – it's got a gin cupboard

Dirk Oehlerking has got a thing or two about art deco streamliners. The German customiser had his first crack at one five years ago (see *Bike*, November 2020), but he's now taken matters to a whole new level with this fully enclosed piece of kinetic art.

It's built around a Royal Enfield Shotgun 650 – and while it's 3.9m long and possesses the turning circle of a bungalow, it does have some excellent practical touches. For example, a cupboard in the rear contains a bedside light, umbrella, bottle of gin, mirror, comb, tonic water, cutlery and glasses.

'Everything must be elegant,' says Dirk, founder of Kingston Custom. 'It's not about provocation or radical change, but about bringing back the elegance of the 1930s. I love that era of art deco – it was about high speed, aerodynamics and elegance. I want to create works of art that stand apart.'

> **'Cupboard in the rear contains a bedside light, umbrella and bottle of gin'**

Clever touches abound. The front wheel covers attach to the forks so the entire bike is enclosed save for a cut-out to allow air to circulate round the engine. A hatch on the right side allows 'maintenance', although presumably that would be a keyhole surgery kind of maintenance. And that funky rear tail light is lifted from a 1958 Cadillac.

Dirk has managed to keep most of the Shotgun 650 – the engine, frame, speedo, headlight and numerous smaller components are untouched. He just fitted forks from an Enfield Classic to make bolting on the wheel covers easier, extended the swingarm by 100mm, replaced the shocks with solid struts, and created a new fuel tank that sits beyond the front wheel.

Instead of faffing about with computer-aided design, Dirk created the bike's bodywork using cardboard and sculpting foam – all in actual size. Then he hand-made the bodywork from 2mm-thick aluminium and using traditional metal bending techniques.

PICS: KLAUS H. DAAMS

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[NEW BIKES]

Tracer 7 back on top?

Slick-looking new **Yamaha Tracer 7** gets all the goodies from the 2025 MT-07 as it tries to topple Triumph's Tiger Sport 660

PILLION
The seat is extended by 40mm and the grips are easier to cling on to.

The Tracer 7 and its 700 predecessor were always cunning buys for the solo tourer. If you weren't lugging a pillion and the associated clobber mountain, the perky 690cc twin was just the job to whisk you away in entertaining fashion. But rivals were closing in, and the old bike was looking and feeling dated. This heavily updated Tracer 7 (£8804) and 7 GT (more kit, £10,104) are Yamaha's answer.

Both are based on the new MT-07, which means they get loads of rider aids thanks to a new ride-by-wire throttle. Cruise control, rider modes (Sport, Street and Custom), three power modes and two traction control settings are all on board. They're managed via new switchgear and a 5in TFT screen that replaces the Casio-esque LCD one.

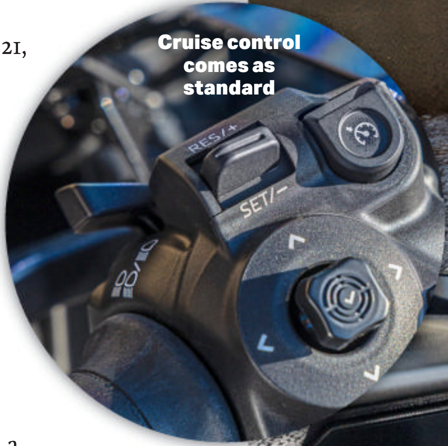
As with the new MT-07, the steel backbone frame has been redesigned for increased torsional, longitudinal and lateral rigidity and the swingarm is 40mm longer to improve high-speed stability and, say Yamaha, give a more planted cornering feel. New 41mm inverted front forks have a rather over-generous 18 levels of rebound damping adjustment. More usefully, the GT's rear shock gets a remote preload adjuster for when you fill up the panniers with Old Peculiar.

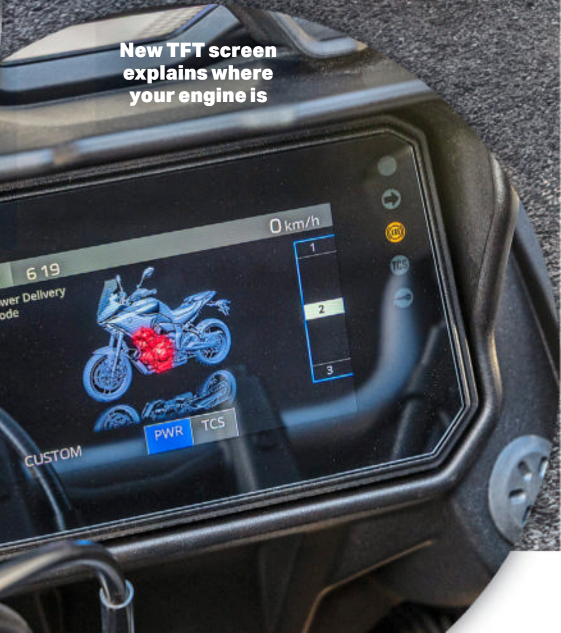
When the Tracer 7 was last updated in 2021, Yamaha made the bars wider and higher – and they've done it again. The grips are now 30mm higher and 50mm wider to give what Yamaha say is 'a more commanding "shoulders back" riding position'. There's a new seat too, with 20mm of adjustment.

The 7 GT comes with all the extra kit that anyone doing miles will want: 90mm taller screen with 60mm of adjustment (the old one wasn't much cop if you were tall), heated grips, centrestand, rubber-inset footpegs for reduced vibration, a thicker seat, plus that rear shock remote adjuster.

Both bikes are available in July.

> 'The 7 GT comes with all the extra kit that anyone doing miles will want'


Cruise control comes as standard


New TFT screen explains where your engine is

PICS: YAMAHA

LARGER TANK
Now up one litre to 18, which should give a 220-mile range at 55mpg.

CRUISE CONTROL
This works from third gear and above 25mph.

ELECTRONICS
Three rider modes, two levels of traction control, cruise control and a 5in TFT screen that shows turn-by-turn navigation via the free Garmin StreetCross app.

BRAKES
New radial front brake calipers replace the conventional old ones. Tyres are Michelin Pilot Road 6 GT.

ENGINE
Straight from the new MT-07: 690cc, 72bhp at 8750rpm and that 270° crankshaft which gives it a V-twinny feel. New slipper clutch, too.

Middleweight tour-off

Here's how the Tracer 7 GT compares with similarly specced rivals

	Yamaha Tracer 7 GT	Triumph Tiger Sport 660	BMW F800GS
Price	£10,104	£10,690	£12,490
Engine	690cc twin	660cc triple	895cc twin
Power	72bhp	81bhp	86bhp
Weight	212kg	207kg	227kg

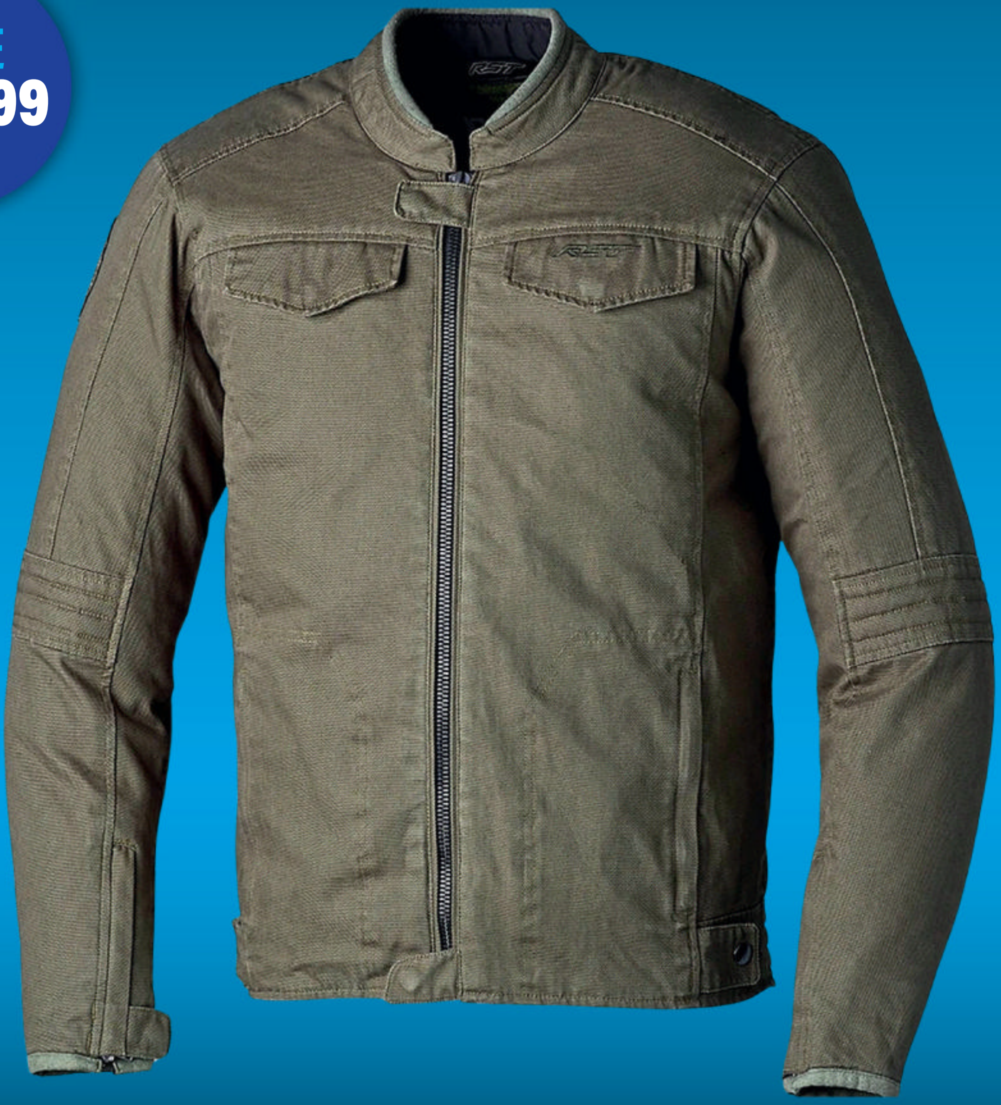
GT: a lot of kit for your ten grand

GET IN GEAR

The latest word in swanky riding gear, desirable bolt-ons and must-have goodies for your pride and joy

By **Lyle Armitage**

PRICE
£199.99



RST Crosby 2

WHAT IS IT? This RST summer jacket is part of their TT collection and named after the famous location on the Isle of Man. Made of cotton canvas, it's A rated and features level one armour, and is available in black (a bit predictable) or this olive (much better). Matching gloves are available if you enjoy a complete look.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Nice and tasteful, this. The jacket itself has a clean, simple design with subtle detailing, and I like that the TT stuff is discreet (on the neck and the right arm) rather than having bright, shouty logos. Shame it's only A rated, however it'd be great over leathers on a chilly evening.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £199.99 **rst-moto.com**

New stuff

Clobber for you and your motorcycle

» Dainese Smart Air

WHAT IS IT? Dainese's latest 'D-air' wind-filled vest is certified at the higher CE level two for chest and back protection. It'll absorb seven times more energy than normal armoured kit once fully inflated. The activation system is fully automated and you can sling it under or over a riding jacket.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? As a skint teenager who's still quite new to bikes, I don't know much about airbags (other than mum's car has them). However, I've seen them in MotoGP, and anything that promises to be this safe in a prang while managing to be visible seems like a grand thing. If you have the budget, of course.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £599 **dainese.com**

PRICE
£599

MERLIN
ADVENTURE SPORT

FROM
£259.99

« Merlin Torres

WHAT IS IT? A full-face adventure-touring hat that's part of the new helmet range from Brit firm Merlin. It boasts several niceties, like a drop-down sun visor, a fibreglass shell bonded with military-grade resin (ooh) and a removable moisture-wicking interior.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Wide view, removable peak, glove-friendly vents. Nice. The Torres has a modern look, tasteful colour schemes, decent features and isn't too expensive either. I like this quite a bit.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
from £259.99 **merlinbikegear.shop**

» Alpinestars SMX-6 V3

WHAT IS IT? The latest sporty street booties from Astars have new rubber soles designed to increase practicality and wearability both on and off the bike. They feature an ankle brace for support, are made from reinforced microfibre, and are dotted with soft and hard armour for impact protection.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Kit that's 'right' is important with younger riders like me. This means not just the looks but the name. The desirable brands with teens are RST (see left) and, of course, Alpinestars. Which means these sporty-looking boots are spot on. I really like the subtle design with the white logo, and the minimalistic but still racy look. I reckon they're awesome.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£249.99 **gb.alpinestars.com**

PRICE
£249.99

» Oxford Stormex Pro

WHAT IS IT? Getting your bike out of sight is one of the first things to do when thinking about security. Oxford's cover obviously does that, but with a separate soft inner (tethered to the outer) to prevent scratches. It's waterproof up to 10,000mm. That sounds like a lot of rain.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? I've just bought a new bike and so this would be the perfect complement to my massive Abus lock. I like the big vents for breathability and the fact it has eyelets at each end to get a lock through, so you can attach either the front or rear to a policeman's leg.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£149.99 **oxfordproducts.com**

PRICE
£149.99

advanced rider series
OXFORD STORMEX PRO
OXFORD STORMEX PRO

PRICE
£399.99

« Wunderlich Active Comfort

WHAT IS IT? Available from accessory whizzes Nippy Normans, these Wunderlich perches are designed to give better support, a more natural riding position and less chance of slipping around for Ducati Multistrada and DesertX riders. They do heated versions as well.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? More luxury for your bumcakes, without spoiling the bike's lines or resorting to a strapped-on cushion affair. Not cheap, but Wunderlich's stuff has a good reputation because… well, it's good. And Ducati don't do an accessory DesertX seat themselves.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£399.99 **nippynormans.com**

» Duchinni Speed Racer

WHAT IS IT? Designed for ages six to 16, this retro-style bomber garment is certified to CE level AA, keeps out the weather, and comes with shoulder, back and elbow armour.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Having tried Duchinni's clobber myself when I was a young 'un, I can vouch for its quality and value. Having a sleeve designed to give up to 30mm of extension is a great touch as it means your rapidly growing child won't immediately grow out of it, and the AA rating means peace of mind. Great to see brands making gear specifically for younger bikers.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£119.99 **duchinni.com**

PRICE
£119.99

> ‘If you’re looking to go all in on the rough stuff these should have a real benefit’

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Touratech BMW R1250GS shocks

WHAT IS IT? Designed as an upgrade over both the conventional and electronic standard units on 2018-24 models, these limited-edition Extreme2 shocks offer a suspension improvement for GS riders looking to hurl themselves at the more challenging sort of terrain. Available as a single unit or a pair, and fully serviceable.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? You would think a high-end adventure bike like the R1250GS would already be equipped for premium parts. I did. But the standard stuff has to be a compromise for both road and trail, and so if you’re really looking to go all in on the rough stuff these should have a real benefit. As long as you have the cash: the front is £1256.93 and the rear is £2095.44. There’s an offer on a pair at £2850.11.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? from £1256.93 **touratech.com**

SHOEI
Bike
VTR
Racing
SP-1
one vision

MAGNESIUM
HONDA
NDA

Steve, wishing he wasn't wearing summer gloves in December

Magnesium covers, HRC cast into the cases: a proper racer, as Joey proved (p62)

PIC: BAUER

2000
Honda SP-1

It's 25 years since Honda took Ducati on at their own game. **Steve Westlake** recalls our first taste of the big V-twin

By **Steve Westlake**

I remember it being dark and wet. It was deepest December in southern England and I was about to ride the VTR1000 SP-1 for the first time on the new Honda's UK premier. Alex Hearn, the affable road tester from *Performance Bikes*, was also there. His approach to the miserable weather was different to mine, and probably wiser. He'd brought a van to take away his SP-1, keeping his powder dry for a warmer day. 'No point riding that thing in these conditions,' he said, with all due respect.

Such pragmatism wasn't the *Bike* way. 'You learn something about a road bike by riding it in all conditions, good or bad,' was our rugged mantra. That's what I told myself as I warily eyed it. It was like a wolf in a cage: the upside-down forks, massively braced swingarm, slash-cut radiator vents, Lord Voldemort face. And beneath the surface, the most aggressive, oversquare V-twin HRC could conjure, growling with Japanese, world-beating vengeance. I can still sense the menace 25 years on.

If you can't beat them, join them (then beat them). So went Honda's face-saving strategy with the SP-1. A ruthless, unpretty, V-twin race bike with a mission to spank the gorgeous Ducati 996 at its own game. When a new bike like this was launched, the pampering would usually begin. Fussed-over journalists fluffed to photogenic climax at some distant, sun-bronzed racetrack or mountain pass. Not so with the SP-1. So here I am. It's a strange feeling. Knowing you are hugely privileged to have this exclusive, money-can't-buy riding experience. But almost wishing you were somewhere else. In a van.

The SP-1 did nothing to soothe my trepidation on the first ride. Its harsh low-rev fuel injection jolt was followed instantly by a surge of tyre-loosening torque that would be sheer joy in better conditions. The ultra-firm suspension was softened not one bit by an ultra-firm seat. The low screen offered the mildest protection from the high-speed, icy windblast. There were no creature comforts this day. I once ran the Tough Guy endurance race near Wolverhampton. It was a different physical experience altogether, but involved a similar sensation of being hunted.

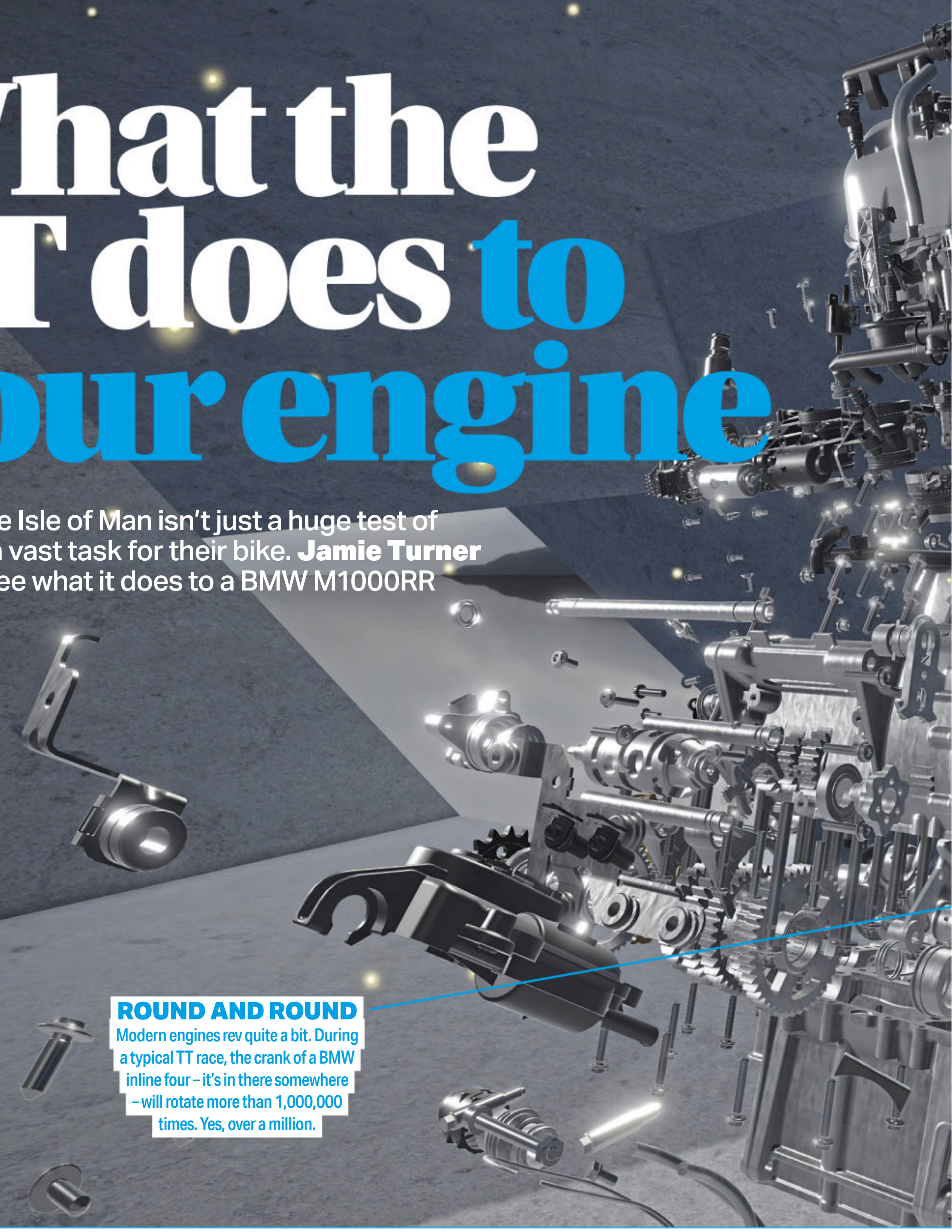
Without knowing it, that first impression of the SP-1 has stayed with me for 25 years. Many subsequent joyous SP-1/SP-2 times on smooth, warm roads and tracks, including an epic trip to see Colin Edwards beat Troy Bayliss to the WSB title at Imola in 2002, have not wiped the memory. *Bike*

What the TT does to your engine

Lapping the Isle of Man isn't just a huge test of rider – it's a vast task for their bike. **Jamie Turner** digs in to see what it does to a BMW M1000RR

By Jamie Turner

Jamie Turner is Professor of Engines at KAUST. He owns a BMW K1200S and loves two-strokes.

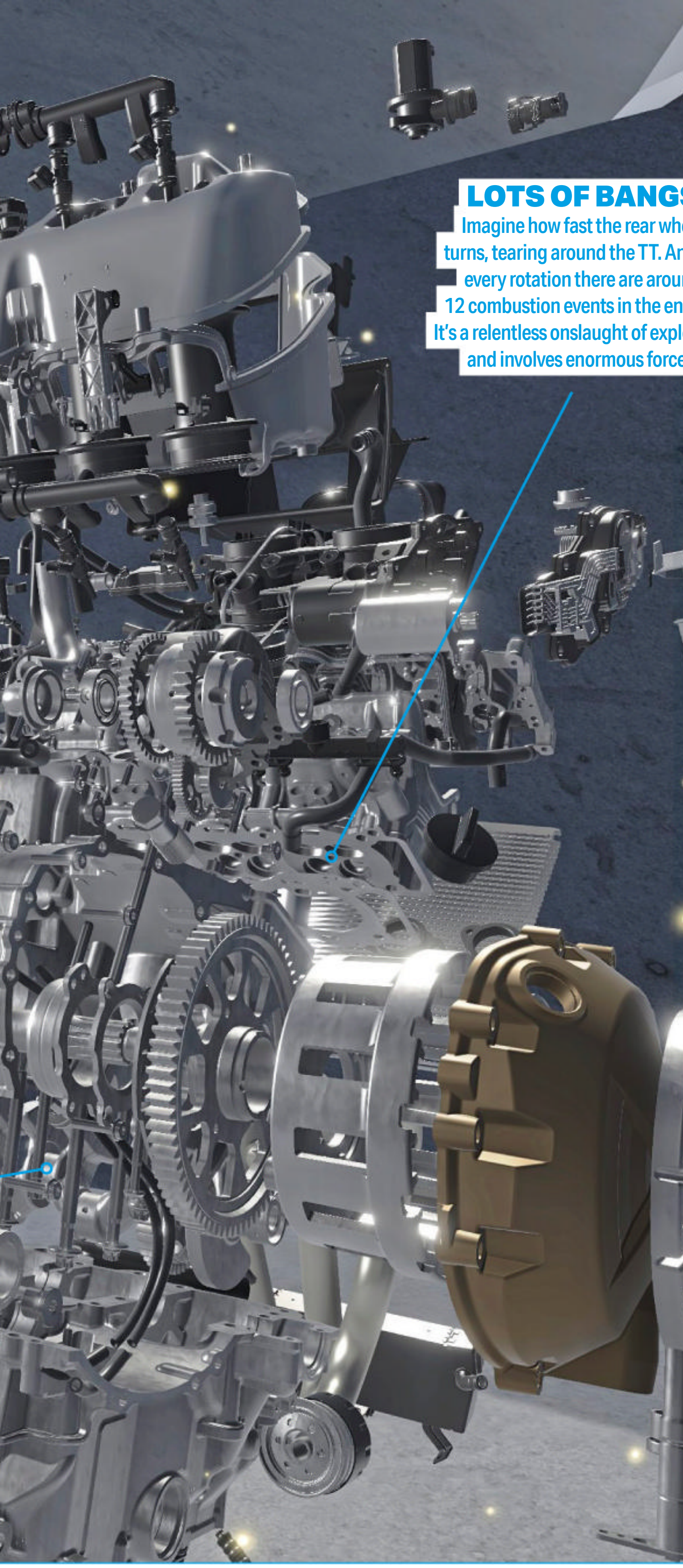


ROUND AND ROUND
Modern engines rev quite a bit. During a typical TT race, the crank of a BMW inline four – it's in there somewhere – will rotate more than 1,000,000 times. Yes, over a million.

We all know the TT is an ordeal for riders and for their mounts. It's easy to see that the engines must be under enormous stress throughout practice and the races. The TT has always been an obvious proving ground for manufacturers, after all – the same as all the great races.

A couple of years ago some of Peter Hickman's BMW M1000RR telemetry was shared with the magazine – it showed the throttle was pinned for 44 per cent of a lap. By digging out some of the spec information for the standard bike and making some (hopefully not too outrageous) assumptions we can put some numbers to things and make some comments. So let's do that, and hope the results aren't a damp squib…

Six laps of the 37.73-mile course means the race distance is 226.4 miles or 364.5km; 44 per cent of this is 99.6 miles or as near as damn it 160km. Knowing this, the first thing I'm going to do is calculate how many rotations of the bike's rear wheel this represents. I'm going to use the road bike information to do this, because the racers have to be close to this and, well, BMW aren't going to share deep specification secrets with us. The rear tyre is a 200/55 ZR17 which, knowing that this means the sidewall height will be 55 per cent of 200mm and it sits on a 17in rim, means it will have a rolling radius of 32.6cm. In turn this means one complete turn of the wheel will cover a distance of 205cm. Now, we all know tyres squash when you put weight



LOTS OF BANGS
Imagine how fast the rear wheel turns, tearing around the TT. And for every rotation there are around 12 combustion events in the engine. It's a relentless onslaught of explosions and involves enormous forces.

It's amazing that they don't all do this...

Peter Hickman and BMW's M1000RR: quite the combo

> 'A force on the piston of more than five tons...'

on them, but equally they grow due to centrifugal forces, so I'm going to say that at speed one turn of the wheel will propel the bike this distance.

Logically then, we can divide 205cm into the distance that represents 44 per cent of the race distance to get the total number of wheel rotations: this turns out to be about 78,300 (a complete race distance is nearly 178,000 rotations). First thing of engineering note: wheel bearings get a real hammering, and I'll bet most of us hardly ever think of them...

Now, how many engine revolutions is this? Well, this is where I am going to make possibly the biggest assumption/guess – I'm going to use the fifth gear ratio to work this out. The rationale runs something like this: yes, a lot of the lap will be flat in sixth, but not all of it, and there are chunks of low-gear acceleration as well. So, you can't use sixth, and knowing the circuit is damned fast it doesn't seem ridiculous to use fifth for a calculation like this. Undoubtedly the telemetry gathered by the team could tell them how many revolutions the engine does, but then that will measure revs in real time and then integrate to get the real number. I can't do that, not least because I don't have the data (and my brain isn't big enough). So, fifth it is.

I managed to find a BMW information fact sheet on t'internet which has most of the information I am going to use here. It says that fifth gear is 1.360:1, the primary reduction ratio is

1.652:1, and the chain sprockets are 17/46 for a final drive ratio of 2.706:1. While one may justifiably expect some fiddling with sprocket sizes, I'm going with the homologated numbers. So, multiply those together and you get the fact that, for each turn of the rear wheel, the engine does 6.08 revolutions – this is the fifth gear overall ratio. That means, for each rotation of the wheel, there are just over 12 combustion events (three in each of the four cylinders).

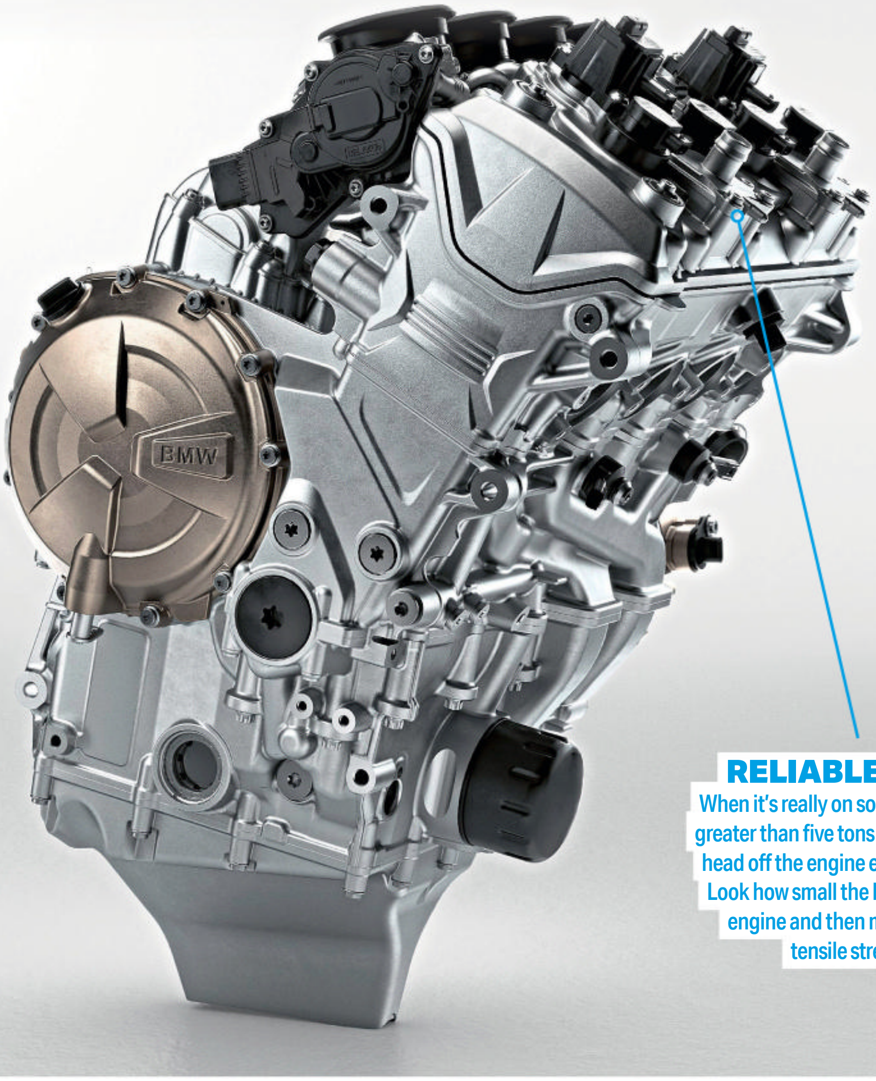
Now, take the number of turns the wheel did over 44 per cent of the race distance and multiply by the fifth gear overall ratio and you get nearly 476,000 engine revolutions. Yes, knocking half a million, with just under 952,000 combustion events. For the whole race distance, it would be comfortably more than a million engine rotations (actually, just over 1,082,000) with north of two million combustions. Clearly, these are Big Numbers.

What else can we calculate? Well, the M1000RR engine has a stroke of 49.7mm, meaning that in one turn of the crankshaft the piston moves a total of 99.4mm. Here I am ignoring the effect of any crankshaft offset in the engine design, but that won't change things much. Knowing how many revolutions the engine has done means we can work out how far the piston moves under those 44 per cent of the distance conditions – the answer is 29.4 miles (it would be 66.8 miles for the whole race distance if the whole thing was done in fifth). Now, that might not sound like much versus the whole race distance, but the stroke is very short indeed in comparison…

Let's now look at the loads the engine is under. That 2022 BMW spec sheet gives a maximum power of 156kW at 14,500rpm, which is 209.2bhp in proper money. To generate this the torque has to be 102.7Nm (75.7 lb.ft), representing a drop of 9.1 per cent from the quoted maximum torque of 113Nm/83.3 lb.ft (remember, we're using data for the 2022 M1000RR). The mean piston speed at maximum power is just over 24m/s – a totally normal number. BMW said they ran it out to 15,000rpm in the race, and for that the mean piston speed is 24.85m/s.

Right, let's calculate something which, if it doesn't scare you, should at least make you appreciate the abilities of the engineers who have created the bike you ride – the maximum inertia force on the small end of the connecting rod, which it has to resist as the piston changes direction during overlap and there are no meaningful gas forces on the piston to counteract it. I've had to make an assumption on its 'l/r' ratio (the rod length divided by the crankshaft throw), but after doing this, at 14,500rpm in the M1000RR, the maximum piston acceleration (the thing that arises from the change in direction) is 73,665m/s^2. This is just over 7500 times the force due to gravity. Newton tells us that force equals mass times acceleration, so to calculate the force involved we now have to assume a piston assembly mass. I am going to say 130g – this may be off, but I am including the mass

BMW's inline four – what madness goes on within

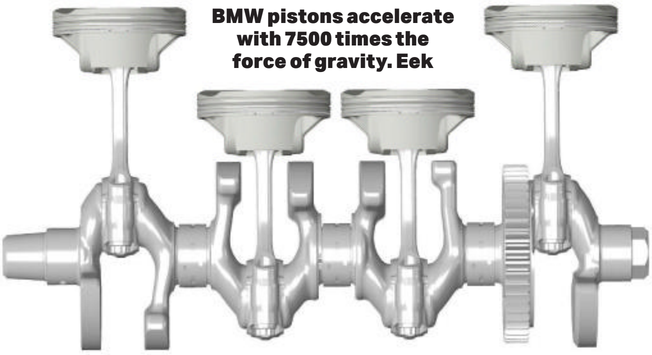


RELIABLE BOLTS

When it's really on song there's a force greater than five tons trying to fling the head off the engine every time it fires. Look how small the bolts are on your engine and then marvel at their tensile strength.

> ‘Each con rod could lift four to five times the mass of your bike without exceeding design limits’

Hickman on a gentle trundle on his M1000RR back in 2023



BMW pistons accelerate with 7500 times the force of gravity. Eek

of the pin, circlips and rings in this. Anyway, multiply that by the acceleration and you get 9576N. Now, divide that by the acceleration due to gravity (or ‘*g*’), or $9.81m/s^2$, and you get the mass that would give that force – it’s 976kg. At 15,000rpm the force trying to pull the pin out of the con rod’s small end eye is comfortably over a ton…

Why do I evoke the engineers who have designed the con rods? Well, assuming the rods in your bike have similar structural capabilities as those in the BMW, each one could lift four to five times the mass of your bike without exceeding its design limits. Of course, the shank of the rod is even stronger – we usually add a third of the mass of the rod to the piston assembly to get the total reciprocating mass. Serious loads are generated there. Whichever way, at maximum power speed this inertia force is being applied many thousands of times a minute, yet the engine holds together. And it’s all going on between your legs…

And *that’s* before we consider the combustion forces.

When we consider combustion, the numbers get even bigger. The forces acting on the small end are, of course, counteracted every other revolution by the gas forces acting on the piston due to combustion. Now, I don’t have a cylinder pressure trace for the BMW, obviously, but highly tuned, naturally aspirated engines will generate a peak cylinder pressure of about 100 bar (one bar is approximately an atmosphere). Given the bore of the engine is 80mm, this produces an instantaneous force on a piston of approximately 50kN – or more than five tons, comfortably bigger than the inertia force, but inwards towards the crank. Subtract the inertia force and that’s about four tons pushing through the rod towards the crankshaft. So the rod itself has to be able to resist massive buckling forces too. (Oh yes, and lest we forget, there is also a five-ton instantaneous force trying to lift the head off the block and fire it through the fuel tank towards your chin. If you ride a Ducati, try not to worry too much where the rear cylinder(s) are pointing…)

Even after nearly 40 years of working with engines, when I calculate numbers like this, I still get a sense of wonder that they work day in, day out, for years on end, and that they can be designed, developed, built and sold for a price that people are happy to pay while making a profit for their manufacturers. The forces and temperatures they sustain are incredible. Their utility is similarly amazing.

While a lap of TT is undoubtedly a stress, Hickman’s bike is *not* a prototype but a development of a homologated, over-the-counter product that also passes difficult emissions tests and is a 200+ bhp softy to ride slowly. I would say this, but, really – mechanical engineering, what an amazing thing. And long live the internal combustion engine – very few things are *anywhere* near as impressive. Especially when you see a TT bike doing massive speeds through urban areas with a complete hero pinning the throttle wide open for nearly half a lap… maybe don’t tell him some of the numbers in this piece, though, eh? **Bike**

'360° action cameras just got even more bulletproof'

The world's best-selling 360° action cam brand – **Insta360** – reveal flagship new X5

SHOOT SMARTER

There's a 3-hour battery life; fast charging from 0 to 80% in just 20 minutes; integration with all major comms systems like Cardo and Sena; waterproofing to 15 meters, and a new magnetic mounting system, too

LIGHT MASTER

The X5's sensors are 144% larger than the X4's, while the Triple AI Chip system reduces image noise for super-clean, uncompressed images, even in low-light conditions

Combining groundbreaking image quality, rugged durability and AI-powered ease of use, the newly released Insta360 X5 is poised to set a new benchmark for action cameras.

The X5's larger sensors and lightning-fast Triple AI Chip system deliver a dramatic leap in image quality, including stunning 8K30fps 360° video. And with PureVideo – a new AI-powered low-light mode – the X5 achieves crisp, cinematic footage in challenging lighting.

The most rugged cam you can buy

The X5 claims to be the toughest 360° camera yet, boasting lenses crafted from a new ultra-durable glass – while a first-of-its-kind replaceable lens system allows you to replace a damaged lenses on the go and keep shooting perfect footage should the worst happen.

The X5's lenses are made from a new, high-strength, scratch-resistant glass that makes them far less likely to be damaged – but carry a Replacement Lens Kit, and you can swap lenses out on the road, ensuring you never miss the action.

'We've seen the same thing happen too many times: a camera takes a single fall, and the lens is scratched or broken,' says Insta360 Product Manager, Robin. 'For 360° creators – especially those in action sports or remote environments – this isn't just inconvenient, it can ruin an entire shoot. That's why lens durability was a non-negotiable for X5's design, and features an ultra-hard optical coating and a reinforced, impact-resistant design to withstand real-world falls. We even made the lenses replaceable, so users can easily swap them out and get going again.'

Record the whole world around you

Shooting with the X5 means you record everything, everywhere, always. No worries about framing, or missing that unmissable moment – just shoot first and choose your angles later. And with the invisible selfie stick effect enabling otherwise impossible third-person shots, it makes capturing on-bike video look like you took a film crew on your ride.

Hit record and X5 produces two files. The all-new InstaFrame Mode simultaneously captures an auto-framed, ready-to-share flat video and a full 360° video to fine-tune later – while the X5's 8K30fps 360° video looks better than ever, with super-sampling from 11K to 8K resulting in minimal loss to image quality for true-to-life shots. With the X5 you'll never miss unexpected moments – regardless of where the action unfolds

The new built-in wind guard and improved audio algorithm delivers sharp, immersive sound even in challenging conditions, while the longer-lasting, faster-charging battery lasts up to 185 minutes recording in 5.7K in Endurance Mode. It can also fast charge from 0 to 80% in just 20 minutes.

Produce perfectly edited videos

The Insta360 app has also undergone a revamp to provide a sleeker user interface and new tools that make editing easier than ever. A one-tap Dewarp button removes fisheye distortion for natural-looking footage, a one-tap export with zero editing or reframing, and more. Existing features – such as Quick Edit and AI Edit for semi-automatic and automatic editing, Shot Lab with 40+ AI templates, as well as a full, manual editing suite – all remain.

With the new X5 you can shoot like a pro – and edit like a pro, too.

Order your Insta360 X5 for £519.99 – and enter the code INSTA360BIKE with any X5 or X5 bundle, and you'll get a FREE Replacement Lens Kit, worth £29.99!

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Bike Next month

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Testers, experts, insiders and know-it-alls reveal this year's greatest new motorcycle

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» **Barcelona or bust: adventure silliness on a £400 Triumph**
» Inside the wild world of Supermoto
» **Ducati's new XDiavel V4 on the Route Napoléon**
» We (foolishly) attempt the Land's End trial... on a nail
» **How easing off makes you faster – a Mackenzie masterclass at Mallory**

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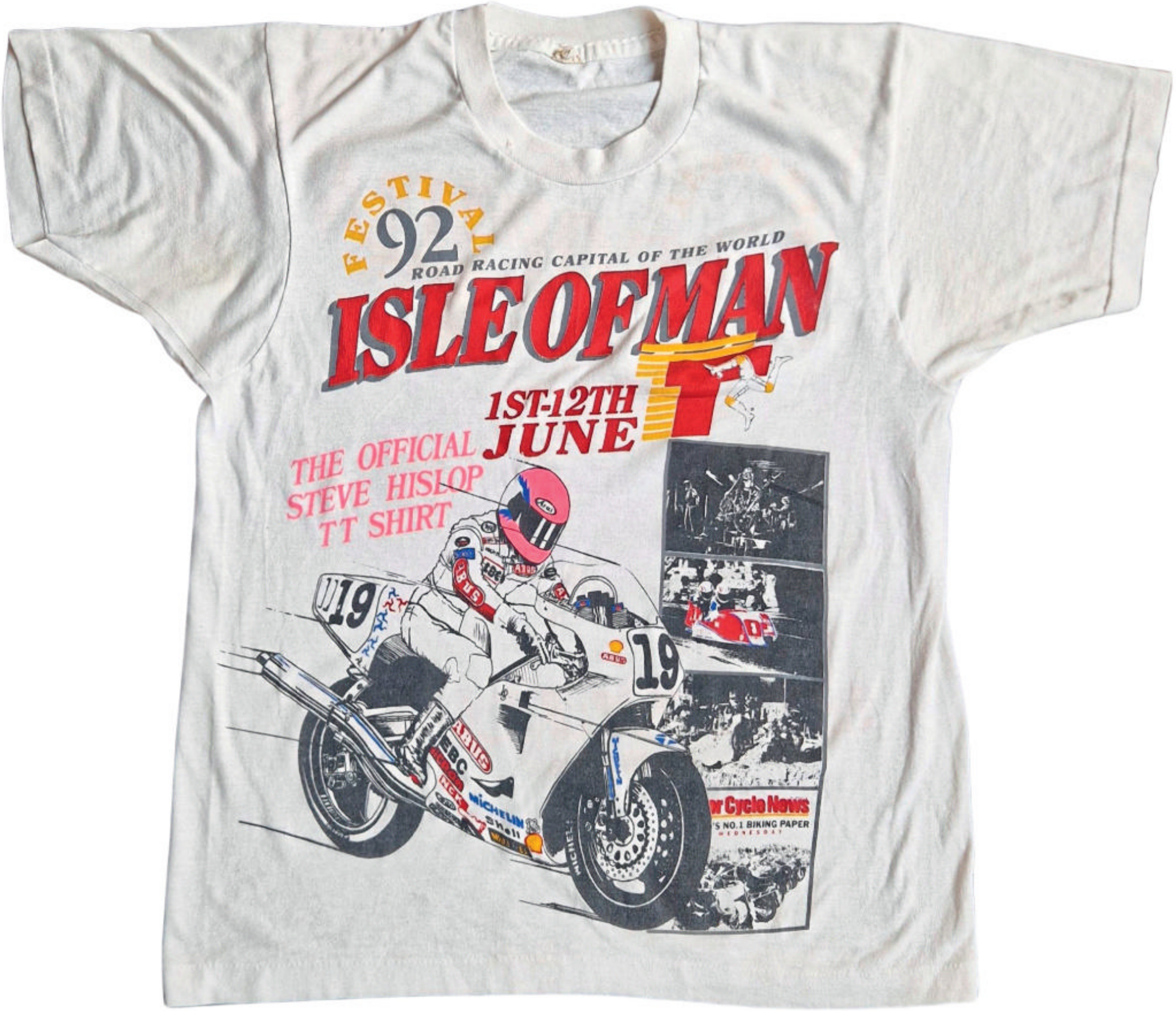
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[**BEEN THERE, GOT THE T-SHIRT**]

'Hizzy wins and the island goes nuts'

I hadn't planned on going to the 1992 TT but, a few weeks before a mate said he's going over for the Senior and staying with a friend who lives there – and that I could kip on his sofa. The ferries were all booked, so no choice but to go by plane then watch everyone on their bikes while I'm being driven around in a small hatchback. We watched from the Bungalow – the epic duel between Steve Hislop on the Norton rotary and Carl Fogarty on a Yamaha. The Norton wins by a few seconds and the island goes nuts. After the race, Hizzy T-shirts were selling faster than hot cakes – all I could find was this smaller-sized one for my then girlfriend who was working abroad at the time. We split up before I had chance to give it to her – so it remains unworn. **Tim Mitchell, Cambridge**

IF YOU'VE GOT AN OLD T-SHIRT LIKE TIM'S AND FANCY SEEING IT IN *BIKE*, TAKE A PICTURE OF THE *WHOLE* SHIRT, ARMS INCLUDED, AND EMAIL IT TO THE ADDRESS AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE. IF WE PUBLISH IT WE'LL SEND YOU A NEW T-SHIRT.

[STAR LETTER]

How do you read yours?

Like many readers (especially those with children), I find solace for a few minutes every day on the throne with a copy of my favourite magazine. If I read slowly, I can usually go a month between issues, but now and again I come up short and get to 'Know How' with a few days to go before the next issue hits the shelves.

So, imagine my delight to find that in my haste to read about the new Triumph Tiger Sport 800 (*Bike*, June), I had inadvertently skipped past the article about the Bol d'Or in the early '80s – I made it to the next issue with a few sheets in hand!

Keep up the good work.

Rob Simpson, Rossendale

Run to the su

For 10 glorious summers, **Team Bike** raced all round Europe with 3000 hedonistic readers in tow. It was as brilliant as it sounds...

Your eye-witnesses

HERE COMES SUMMER

Britain's best-selling bike magazine is also the ultimate bathroom read with features like this

Enduring memories

Run to the Sun (*Bike*, June) – what a great article by John Westlake. So many memories (very hazy) from a trip to Le Mans for the 24-hour race, back in the day of Godier Genoud and their Kawasaki. Magnifique.

Tom Perry

Sign him up, FIM

Another very informative article by your resident engine guru Jamie Turner (*Bike*, July).

I enjoyed the well-thought-out and presented précis of the MotoGP engine rules. I must admit I know the bore x stroke of pretty much every motorcycle engine, its MPS, and work out my bikes' MPS for a given speed on longer runs – I relish this kind of thing.

More importantly, I'm with Jamie and would love to see a diversity of engine types and layouts – if not just for their noise signatures.

As I read on, I found my mind leaping ahead – 'but Jamie, what about this?', and 'what about if they do that?'. Yet by the end the this, that and more had been described with a well-argued critique. So much information in so few words.

FIM: please ask Prof Turner to join your engine rules committee. And Jamie: keep these fantastic technical articles coming.

Nick Brewer, CEng, MIMechE

Mirror, mirror on a stick. For checking oil it does the trick

Value-added smiles and miles

Thank you for the group test on naked value (*Bike*, July). I have been a reader of this fantastic magazine since the early '80s and, like many, lusted after the latest and greatest. But now the years are creeping up on me, my priorities have changed.

I own a Royal Enfield Classic 350 Reborn. It isn't fast, but that's missing the point – it's immense fun to ride and has that giggle factor described in your group test. It's also incredible value for money and unbelievably cheap to run.

I am now a convert who's willing to look away from the usual manufacturers – it's obvious the collaborations in manufacturing have led to vastly improved build quality and reliability, and the savings can be used to put many miles of smiles in my memoirs.

Stuart Wynne

Oil's well...

As great as modern motorcycles are, I lament the passing of the dipstick as a means to check engine oil level. Instead we have a sight glass low down on the side of the engine – fine if you have a centrestand, but if you only have a sidestand checking the level is a bit tricky.

I was discussing this with a good friend of mine, Malc, who isn't a motorcyclist but came up with a great idea of using an inspection mirror. He had one and gave it to me. It works a treat – you can sit astride the upright bike and check the level looking into the mirror.

And a telescopic mirror can be carried with you on your journey.

Richard Bailey

Camera catch

I've just finished reading *Cheap for a reason?* (*Bike*, July), in particular the segment from Manny Villalba about his Voge DS900X 'and the quality of the dashcam'.

I really hope they don't take it to Portugal, Austria or Luxembourg as they will be landed with a fine that can go up to £21,000... and that isn't a typo.

Dashcams are illegal in those countries. Even having one disconnected and stowed away will still get you a fine. But as it's fixed on a Voge...

Steve Shepheard

Clearing it up

Reference your Morbidelli review (*Bike*, July). I've switched from my 245bhp Ninja H2 to Chinese bikes of late and added a Morbidelli C1002V to my collection to save 50+ per cent on any equivalent cruiser from 'established' marques.

While I don't doubt one of your road testers had a 'moment' on the bike, I think it's harsh to call the ground clearance 'absurd'. I have ridden mine two-up for 800 miles and never touched anything down. The reason? A nicely located hand wheel preload adjuster under the left side panel. Together with the damping adjuster, this makes the ride spot on for the intended use.

Sebastian Seal

Well worth the wait

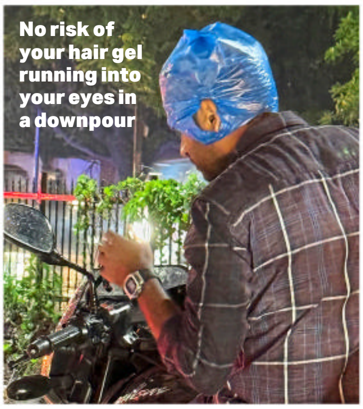
In March 2015 you ran an article about riding in New Zealand. It took me 10 years to get there, but boy was it worth the wait.

I was lucky enough to do the full 21-day tour of both islands, but for good measure added three more days to finish in Auckland (my starting point) and complete my 3552-mile trip.

We often talk of a sense of freedom riding a motorcycle. Well, the New Zealand roads and scenery take it to another level.

Michael Hirst

Michael on his New Zealand tour. The roads are as good as the vistas



No risk of your hair gel running into your eyes in a downpour

Tech over ego

Some while back I was marshalling at a wet race event. A rider hit the brakes, and instantly the ground. He was comfortably leading.

Somewhat earlier, at the other end of the same straight, still in the wet, I lit up the rear wheel and spat myself into the scenery.

Obviously, neither of us had ABS or traction control. And obviously, the road is not the track – the surface is worse, the circumstances far less predictable, and you haven't ridden that road that day.

I've read some grumbling about how this new-fangled technology is somehow bad. I have close on 40 years without these aids, but my ego can take the dent of some code outperforming me.

If it manages to save my bacon once, surely it's a worthy inclusion?

David Trustrum, New Zealand

That'll keep the water out

I am a retired ex-biker and am currently in Hyderabad in India. In a taxi one night, in the rain, I took this photograph (left).

This is how real men ride!

Robert Scott

Loss and resilience

Some possessions hold a significance that transcends their physical form. My red Ducati Multistrada 950 S was exactly that, a faithful friend that carried me through some of my toughest times and always managed to reset my ADHD-addled brain.

The afternoon I found it missing, it felt like the world had shifted off its axis. I stood there, staring at the empty space where it stood. The anger that followed was as raw as it gets.

However, there's also a quiet resilience in knowing the journey doesn't end with a single loss. My Multistrada has gone, but it will be replaced. With a tracker this time.

As for the thieves, I wish you gout. The vengeful, Old Testament kind that waits until a long walk or you've slipped into new shoes; that throbs through weddings and holidays; that mocks you with every step. May your stolen joy come with a permanent limp and a lifetime of uncomfortable footwear.

Dan Simmons

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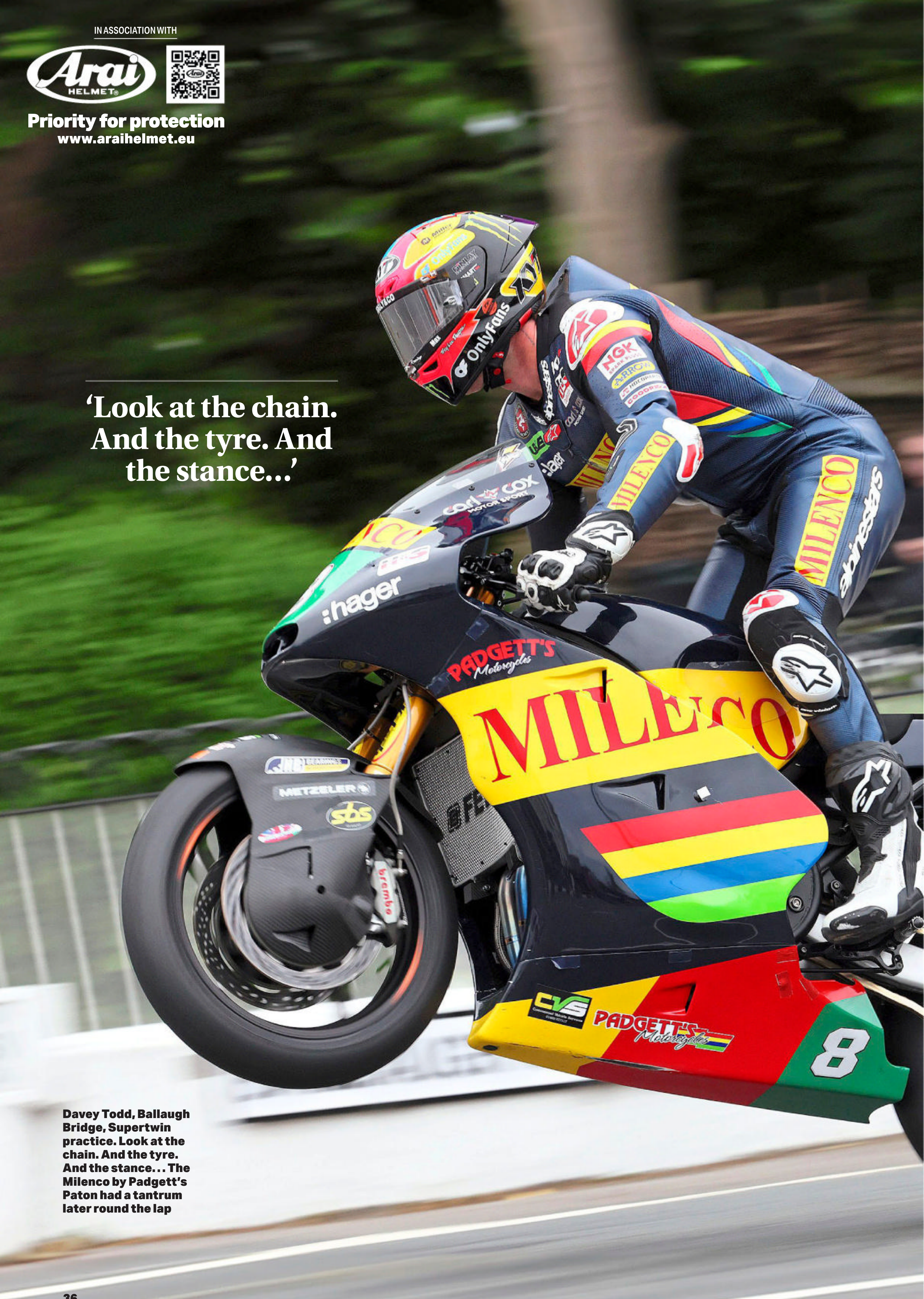
MILENCO
PADGETT'S Motorcycles
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METZELER
8

> ‘Look at the chain. And the tyre. And the stance…’

Davey Todd, Ballaugh Bridge, Supertwin practice. Look at the chain. And the tyre. And the stance… The Milenco by Padgett’s Paton had a tantrum later round the lap

Isle of Man TT

For two weeks every year a windswept, rain-lashed but beautiful and magical island in the Irish Sea becomes the centre of the bike racing universe. *Bike* celebrates this year's action and the people, bikes and stories that make it unlike anything else on Earth

Photography **Stephen Davison**

How Honda ruled the Island

Honda at the TT

Did you know the TT is why HRC exists? This is the story of Big H on the Island.

page 42

'The TT is tougher than ever'

It ain't so easy

How and why the racing is both tougher and closer then ever before.

page 48

Why everyone wants to ride for Honda

Where do I sign?

Isle of Man legends reveal why being a factory Honda star is so special.

page 50

Blimey, I won a TT!

40 years ago...

Bike contributor Mat Oxley recalls his 250cc proddie win back in 1985.

page 54

[Inside]

Inside the TT paddock

Inside the paddock

Meet the TT people who make the races such a wonderful experience.

page 56

'HE WAS A MAN OF TRUTH'

Joey, 25 years on

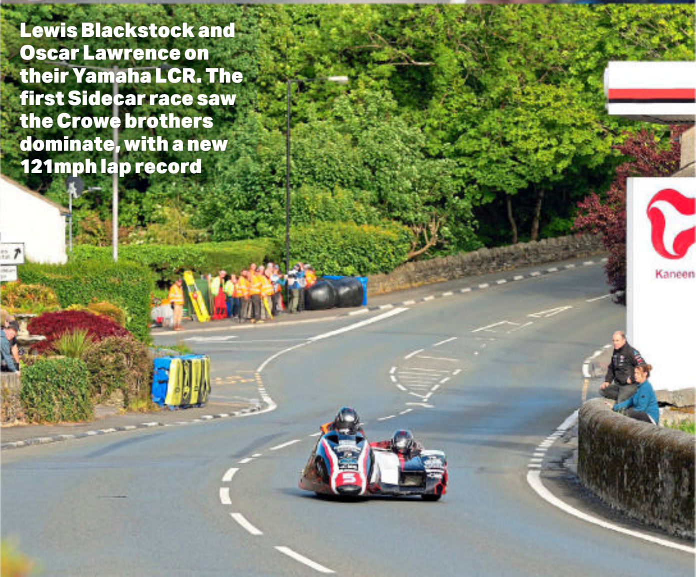
Remembering and celebrating Yer Maun. There's never been anyone like him.

page 62

Practice week was moist, with schedule disruption and the deployment of oversuits. 'I was cautious when there were still damp patches out there, possibly too cautious,' said John McGuinness after Tuesday's session, 'but better that than to slide off into the mud'

The ideal way to deal with a humpback is for the rear wheel to land slightly before the front. Mr M. Dunlop cares not. This was his style whether on a Supertwin or his BMW Superbike

One of the TT's special sights: the marshals head out to the Mountain ready for practice



Lewis Blackstock and Oscar Lawrence on their Yamaha LCR. The first Sidecar race saw the Crowe brothers dominate, with a new 121mph lap record

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‘How anyone manages to do this is beyond us’

Quite how anyone manages this while right next to the course is beyond us

Manx winner and member of the 130mph lap club, Shaun Anderson, makes sure the spectators are awake. Face says it all

53 years old, his 27th TT, yet McGuinness is still thrilled. 'All the years of experience don't prepare you for going off down Glencrutchery Road and Bray Hill for the first time at full speed,' he said. 'Your eyes are on stalks and it's a shock to the system...'

All those TT 'barriers' are usually average lap speed. Did anyone ever expect to see 30 wins?

2025 newcomers Barry Burrell (37) and Mitch Rees prepare for their untimed guided laps with S1000RR-mounted rider liaisons Milky Quayle and John Barton

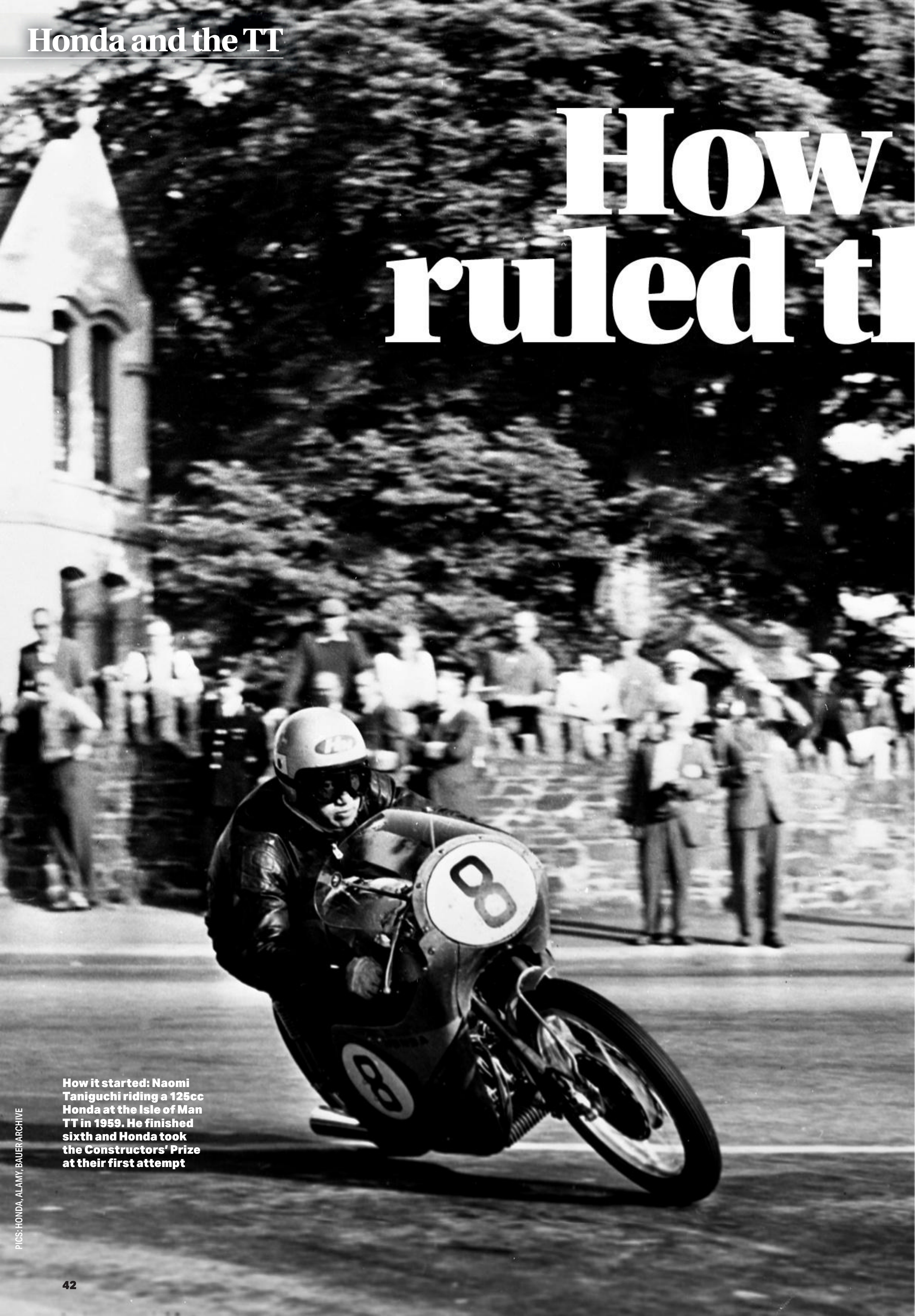
James Hillier didn't have a ride before sorting a last-second deal with his previous Bournemouth Kawasaki team – and stuck his ZX-6R on the podium in Supersport

‘Ducati hadn’t won a TT since Robert Holden on a Supermono in 1995’

Ducati hadn't won a TT since 1995 (Robert Holden won the Singles race on a Supermono by 1m 30s). 30 years later and Michael Dunlop put Ducati on top in Supersport race one – his 30th win. The bike was the Panigale V2 that won the 2024 World Supersport title

Hillberry, practice, and Davey Todd and Ian Hutchinson get close for the phone cameras. Note damp patches **Bike**

How ruled t



How it started: Naomi Taniguchi riding a 125cc Honda at the Isle of Man TT in 1959. He finished sixth and Honda took the Constructors' Prize at their first attempt

PICS: HONDA, ALAMY, BAUER ARCHIVE

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Honda he Island

The TT started Honda's obsession with motorsport, provoked the formation of HRC and generated some of the company's finest motorcycles. Here's how

By **John Westlake**

How it's going: Michael Dunlop takes a leisurely ride through Bray Hill on his way to winning the 2023 Superbike TT on the Honda Fireblade

The Honda team at their TT debut. From left: riders Junzo Suzuki and Giichi Suzuki, team leader Kiyoshi Kawashima, riders Naomi Taniguchi and Teisuke Tanaka, rider and interpreter Bill Hunt, and chief of maintenance Hisaichi Sekiguchi

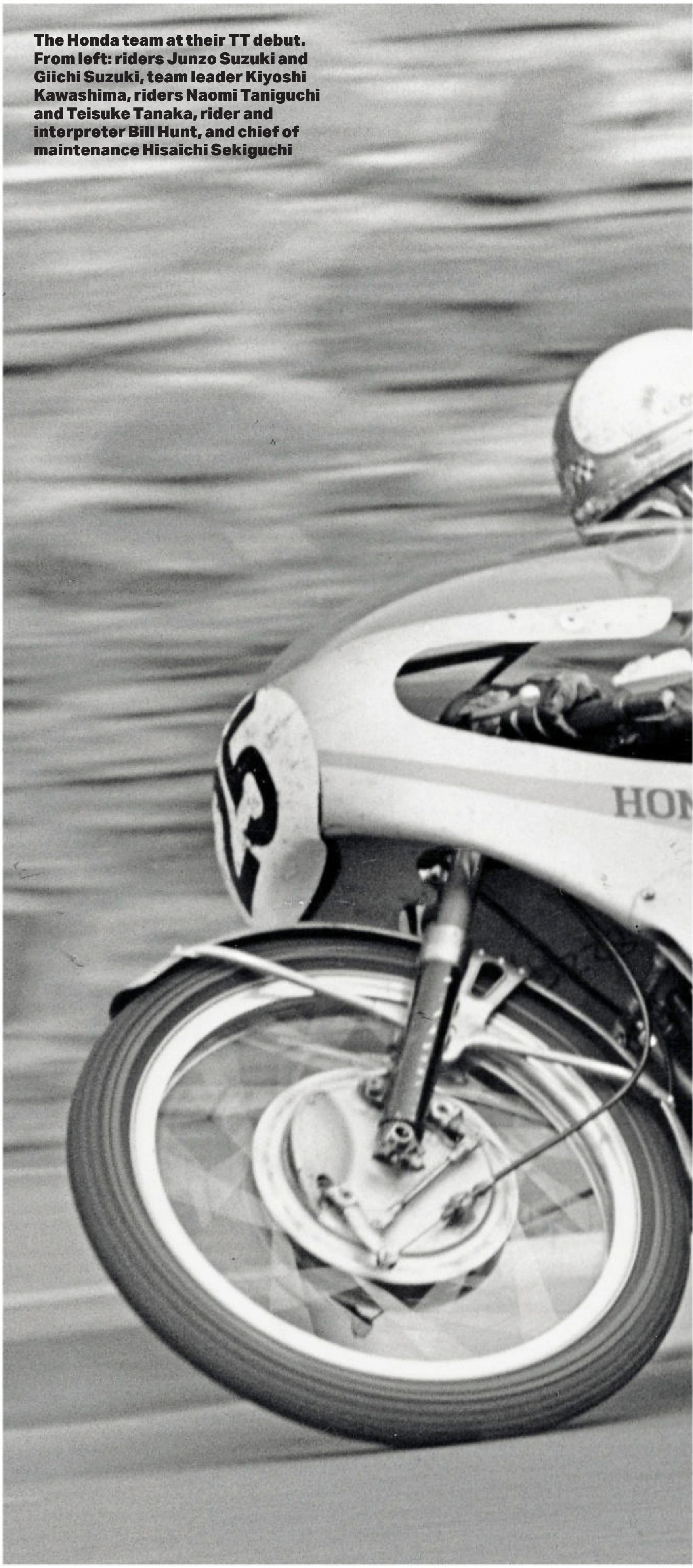
To understand how a vast Japanese motorcycle manufacturer became obsessed with a race around a tiny island in the Irish Sea, we must return to 1953. Soichiro Honda – who had founded the Honda Motor Company four years earlier – is on a shopping trip in England, looking at machine tools for his factory back home. Then, as a lifelong race fan, he decides to visit the Isle of Man to watch the TT – then a round of the Grand Prix world championship. It was a decision that gave his company a dedicated focus that continues to this day.

What he witnessed was exactly the challenge he wanted for Honda – a test of speed, skill and reliability so extreme that TT aficionados regarded him as a deluded eccentric (that's the polite, non-racist version). But he was convinced – and so the TT obsession began. In 1954 he wrote a letter to his staff that was the equivalent of JFK's 'we're going to put a man on the moon' speech. It's too long to reproduce in full, but these highlights give a sense of the man and his determination:

Now that we are equipped with a production system in which I have absolute confidence, the time of opportunity has arrived. I have reached the firm decision to enter the TT races next year. Never before has a Japanese entered this race with a motorcycle made in Japan… I will fabricate a 250cc racer, and as the representative of our Honda Motor Co., I will send it out into the spotlight of the world.

I am confident that this vehicle can reach speeds exceeding 180km/h (112mph)… To achieve this, it must be supported by meticulous attention to detail and unremitting effort. Let us bring together the full strength of Honda Motor Co. to win through to this glorious achievement. The future of Honda Motor Co. depends on this, and the burden rests on your shoulders.

Work began on the engine but it soon became apparent the company needed a racing department. A young engineer called Kiyoshi Kawashima was in charge of the TT project and he later said: 'We started working on a prototype engine, which was finished by the end of the year. However, the Old Man [ie, Soichiro Honda] was being troublesome, people all around us were being troublesome, everybody was telling us what to do, and the situation was a mess. I told them, please make us into a specialised unit or



> ‘Anyone who was a respectable engineer wouldn’t have considered getting into anything so reckless as competing in the Isle of Man TT. None of us were respectable, from the Old Man down’

125cc, five cylinders, eight gears. The RC149 was typical of Honda’s nonconformist approach. Here’s Mike Hailwood as smooth and fast as ever on it at the TT in 1966. It made 30bhp at 18,000rpm – so just imagine the howl from those pipes

I won't go on with this, and the response was simple: "Do it!"' And so the TT sparked the creation of the Honda Racing Corporation (HRC), although it wasn't called that until much later.

It also set the template for HRC's fearless attitude – the creation of Honda's big-bang NSR500, oval-pistoned NR500, and the original V5 RC211V MotoGP bike can be traced back to the way Kawashima's TT team operated. 'All of us were nonconformists in one way or another,' he said. 'Anyone who was a respectable engineer wouldn't have considered getting into anything so reckless as competing in the Isle of Man TT. None of us were respectable, from the Old Man down.'

They were young, too. 'Around that time, there were a lot of engineers who were in their 30s and 40s,' said Kawashima. 'But the company went ahead and gave the job to a bunch of young guys instead. We were all in our 20s. Although we were given a lot of responsibility, we were so young that it didn't scare us.'

Incidentally, the practice of putting young hotshot engineers straight into HRC continues to this day and groups of them still get sent to the TT.

'When I was there, five to ten up-and-coming engineers fresh out of university were sent over every year so they could learn what it was all about,' says Dave Hancock, who was variously a Honda sales chief, team boss and R&D rider. 'No other manufacturer did that. It was part of their induction process.'

'TT is in Honda's hearts – you go to the Honda museum in Japan and it's the story of the TT'

By 1959 – admittedly four years later than Soichiro hoped – the team was ready and nine staff headed off to the Isle of Man a month before the races to get their four bikes ready. That first trip is worthy of a film – they spoke little English, didn't like the food and were beset by technical problems. Tyres disintegrated, chains fell apart, spark plugs lost their electrodes, pistons holed… but the 125cc engines held together.

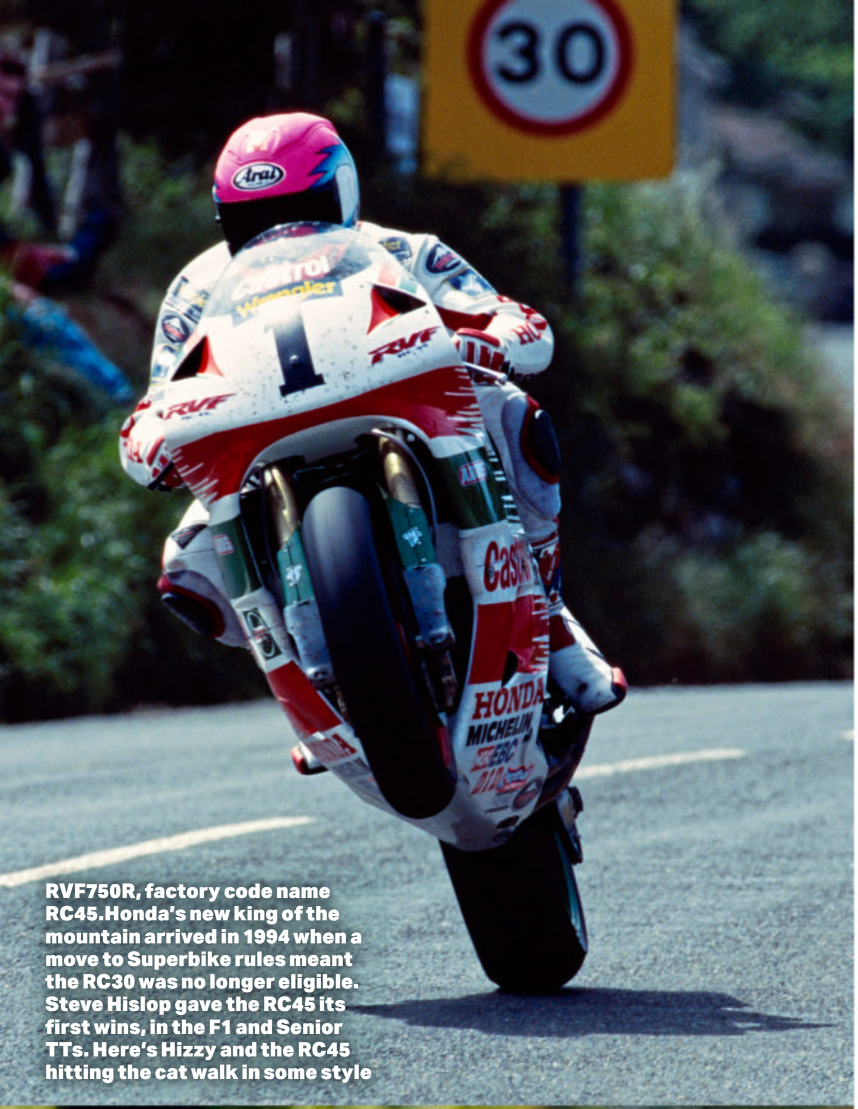
And the race results were staggering. An MV won, an MZ was second and a young Mike Hailwood came third on a Ducati – no surprises there – but the four-stroke, twin-cylinder Hondas came in sixth, seventh, eighth and 11th and the team took the Constructors' Prize. All the Honda engineers came back determined to win a TT – and two years later they did just that with Hailwood in the saddle.

Ever since, the TT has held a special place in the heart of Honda management and has led to some phenomenal efforts to win – as Hancock recalls.

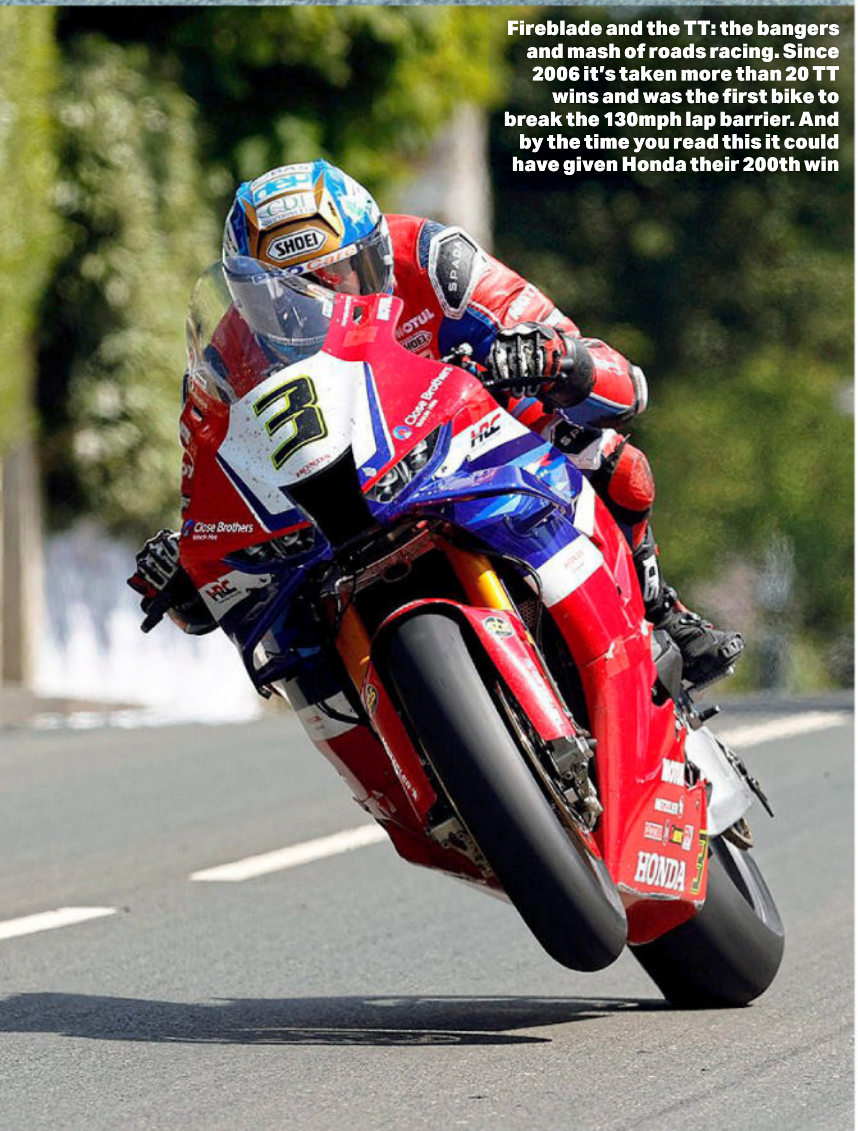
'In 1997 I was in Japan. Bob [Macmillan, Honda UK boss] asked me to get a meeting with Nakamoto-san [HRC president] and ask for a factory RVF for Phillip McCallen at the TT. Nakamoto-san said he didn't have one, then hesitated before saying he'd build us one. He went over to the whiteboard and wrote down loads

Onboard cameras haven't always been dinky. Here's Joey Dunlop showing off the unit he lugged round for a practice lap on the RS850R in 1983. He then narrated it afterwards. Type 'V Four Victory' into YouTube – distractions don't get better

Phillip McCallen on the RC30 in 1993. He won the Senior TT by 45 seconds – a fitting send-off for the RC30 in its final year of competition. Splatted flies a sure sign it was a warm one



RVF750R, factory code name RC45. Honda's new king of the mountain arrived in 1994 when a move to Superbike rules meant the RC30 was no longer eligible. Steve Hislop gave the RC45 its first wins, in the F1 and Senior TTs. Here's Hizzy and the RC45 hitting the cat walk in some style



Fireblade and the TT: the bangers and mash of roads racing. Since 2006 it's taken more than 20 TT wins and was the first bike to break the 130mph lap barrier. And by the time you read this it could have given Honda their 200th win

of figures and said "it'll cost Honda UK £250,000". I phoned Bob and he just said "we need it", so I told Nakamoto-san yes and started packing up. Then he says "but you need spare parts" and started writing on the whiteboard again. That was another £175,000. So Phillip's engine cost £425,000. No one else would have the determination or budget to do something like that.'

McCallen won the F1 and Senior (and also the Production, on a Fireblade), so was it worth it? 'Well, even though it was an RVF, everyone linked it with the VFR and it cemented the reliability of Hondas in people's minds,' says Hancock. 'That's what we wanted. And that's what Mr Honda wanted all those years ago.'

It wasn't just big budgets though. It was clear to Hancock that Soichiro Honda had passed down his TT obsession with concentrating on details. For example, in 1998 the creator of the Fireblade, Tadeo Baba, came over to the Island. But he was on more than a sightseeing trip. 'He blueprinted the engine in Jim Moodie's Sanyo Honda Fireblade,' says Hancock. 'Then, on the night before the race he gave a box to Mick Grant, who was Jim's team manager, and says "please fit this chain to Jim's Fireblade". He had heard about chains stretching, and said this would fix it.

'Mick didn't want to fit it because there was no time to run it in, but it was Baba-san, so he did. Jim won the race, and when he came in I put my foot under the chain and it was as good as new. And then Baba says to Mick: "Please can I have the chain back? I borrowed it from the Suzuka 8 Hours bike and it's very special. No one knows I have it, so I have to put it back on the shelf." This was the level of detail senior engineers would go to make sure they won the TT.'

The engineers' devotion was apparent in other ways. When John McGuinness was developing Honda's electric TT bike (which was run by Mugen, a Honda offshoot set up by Soichiro's son Hirotoshi) he loved working with the young Japanese. 'It was staffed by really clever young engineers, just like the teams were in the old days,' says McGuinness. 'And they were so dedicated. I dropped the electric bike turning it round once – it was a heavy thing – and one of the engineers threw himself underneath it to stop it getting damaged. Their dedication is something else.'

As *Bike* goes to press, that dedication has given Honda 198 TT wins – by far the most of any manufacturer – and has made TT heroes of dozens of riders, from Hailwood to Joey Dunlop to McGuinness.

Given that McGuinness is still riding for Honda 27 years after he first piloted a TSR250 around the Island in 1998, it seems fitting for him to have the last word on the company's obsession.

'The TT is in Honda's hearts – you go to the Honda museum in Japan and it's the story of the TT. And here I am at my age [53 – Ed] still riding a factory Honda at the TT and setting off number one. There's something about a factory Honda with number one on it, and I'm riding it. Amazing.

'I went away from Honda for a while [he rode for Norton in 2018-19 –Ed] but I hated it. I came back in 2022 and it was like putting on my favourite pair of slippers. I love the people, the place and the bikes. It's a special combination.' *Bike*

'The TT is tougher than ever'

Gone are the days when you could pitch up on a factory RVF and blow rivals away. Now it's a lot more complicated

By **John Westlake**

'The desire to win at the TT is a constant with Honda,' says team manager Havier Beltran, sitting among his 15-strong team of TT mechanics, data analysts and suspension technicians. 'But the event has changed massively.'

He's not talking about the track itself – though of course various bits have been smoothed out – but how the rules have both increased competition and ruled out wildly exotic machinery. 'You can't just

Dean Harrison (standing, facing camera) talks tactics with Honda's suspension chief Phil Roach

> 'In Superstock the Fireblade is an absolute weapon. But the TT is definitely more of a battle than it ever was'

PICS: HONDA/BONNIE LANE

install a factory engine like they used to,' says Beltran, who's been going to the TT since 1994 and involved in the Honda factory race team since 2006.

'In the Superbike class we have to use standard camshafts – the bottom end from the pistons down is standard. We used to be able to fit loads of factory kit parts but now we have to follow BSB specifications. What you get is an incredible production-based machine, rather than a true factory one. And of course in Superstock form you're only allowed to change bodywork and exhaust, with a kit ECU, new fork cartridge and rear shock. The wheels and swingarm of those are standard.'

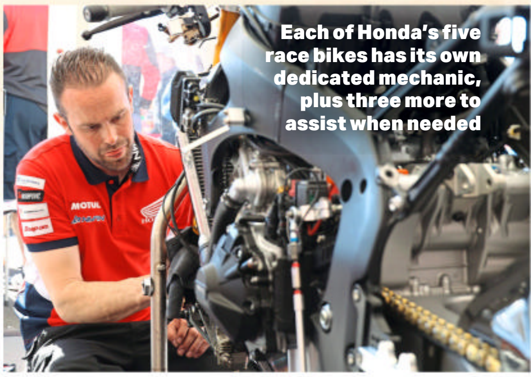
The result is that far more teams can get their Superbikes to a level where a top rider could win on them. The scenario in 2000 when Joey Dunlop told Honda that his new SP-1 was not fast enough to win so they borrowed an engine from Aaron Slight's World Superbike couldn't happen today.

Another complicating factor is how good the base production bikes are compared to 20 years ago. This means the few changes made to prepare them for the Superstock race are enough to make them almost as good as a factory Superbike. In fact, possibly better – Peter Hickman's lap record of 136.358mph was set on a Superstock BMW. He went slower on his far tricker Superbike.

This erodes any motivation the factories might have to spend hundreds of thousands on the Superbike, when the investment might not even result in a faster lap. 'HRC don't help us in the same way anymore,' confirms Beltran. 'Their priorities at the moment are MotoGP and World Superbikes, plus trials, Dakar, motocross… The link between the TT and HRC is still there, but the relationship is different because now we've got a control ECU and the bikes are all pretty evenly matched.' In other words, what's the point of HRC getting involved?

There's also the problem for Honda that BMW have recognised the value of the TT and – perhaps because they don't have a MotoGP team to pay for – can give riders the support that only Honda used to manage. Michael Dunlop, for example, is rumoured to get direct help from the BMW World Superbike team with his Hawk Racing M1000RR. It's the same story with Peter Hickman and Davey Todd on their BMW UK-supported M1000RRs. BMW have even taken over supplying bikes for the TT's travelling marshals and cars for medics.

Honda are still a huge force at the TT, of course. 'We go there with a belief that Dean Harrison can get on the podium, and John [McGuinness] is still very fast and could do well,' says Beltran. 'And in Superstock the Fireblade is an absolute weapon.' He's right: at the time of writing their experience and nous have just let Dean win the first Superstock race. And Beltran knows this is a hard-fought win: 'The TT is definitely more of a battle than it ever was.'


Each of Honda's five race bikes has its own dedicated mechanic, plus three more to assist when needed

Honda's TT team in numbers

» The scale of Honda's TT investment may have reduced over the years, but they're still not messing about…

18 staff
3 HGVs (two for team, one for hospitality)
1250 litres of Elf racing fuel
5 race bikes
15 Öhlins shocks
6 computers
48 wheels (specific reinforced ones for Superbike races)
8 mechanics
1 ECU engineer
100 fork springs
6000 posters for fans
48 tyre warmers
25 sets of different steering offset yokes
2 tyre technicians
4 support vehicles
5 Snap-on 54in tool chests (one per bike), plus three 36in chests
10 spare front forks
10 spare ECUs
70 rear shock springs
20 different suspension linkage options
100 litres of Motul oil
4 spare engines
2 catering staff
90 square metres of garage
2 start line generator trolleys
10 spare fairings
20 sets of SBS brake pads
10 clutch packs
2 boxes of Sharpies

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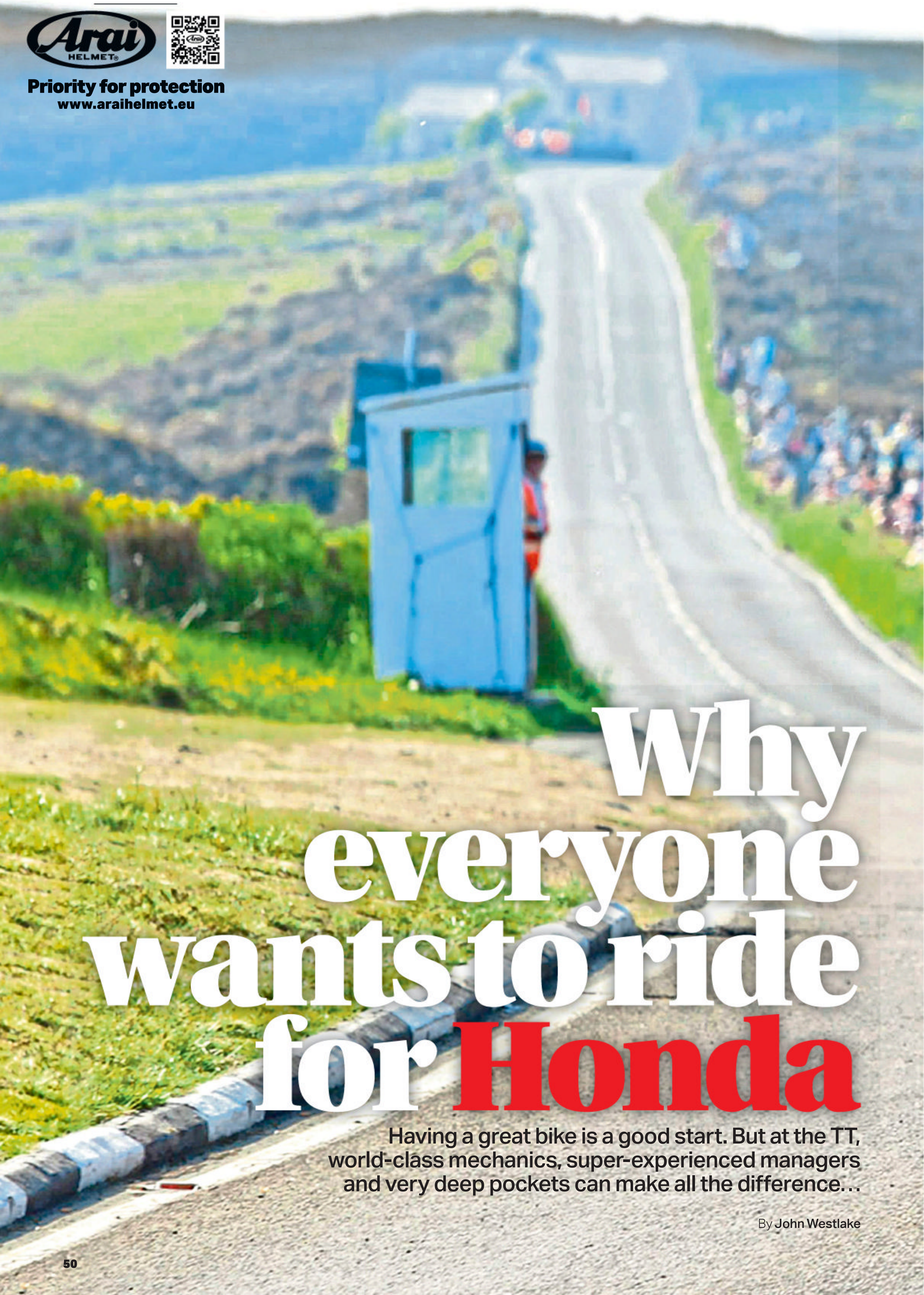


Why everyone wants to ride for Honda

Having a great bike is a good start. But at the TT, world-class mechanics, super-experienced managers and very deep pockets can make all the difference...

By **John Westlake**

PICS: PACEMAKER, BAUER

As the only pukka factory team at this year's TT, Honda once again had the biggest presence in the paddock and packed the entry lists with Fireblades and CBR600RRs. But winning 198 TTs at the time of writing – way more than any other manufacturer – must surely take more than just deep pockets. We ask five of Honda's best ever TT riders what makes Honda the most successful team the TT has ever seen.

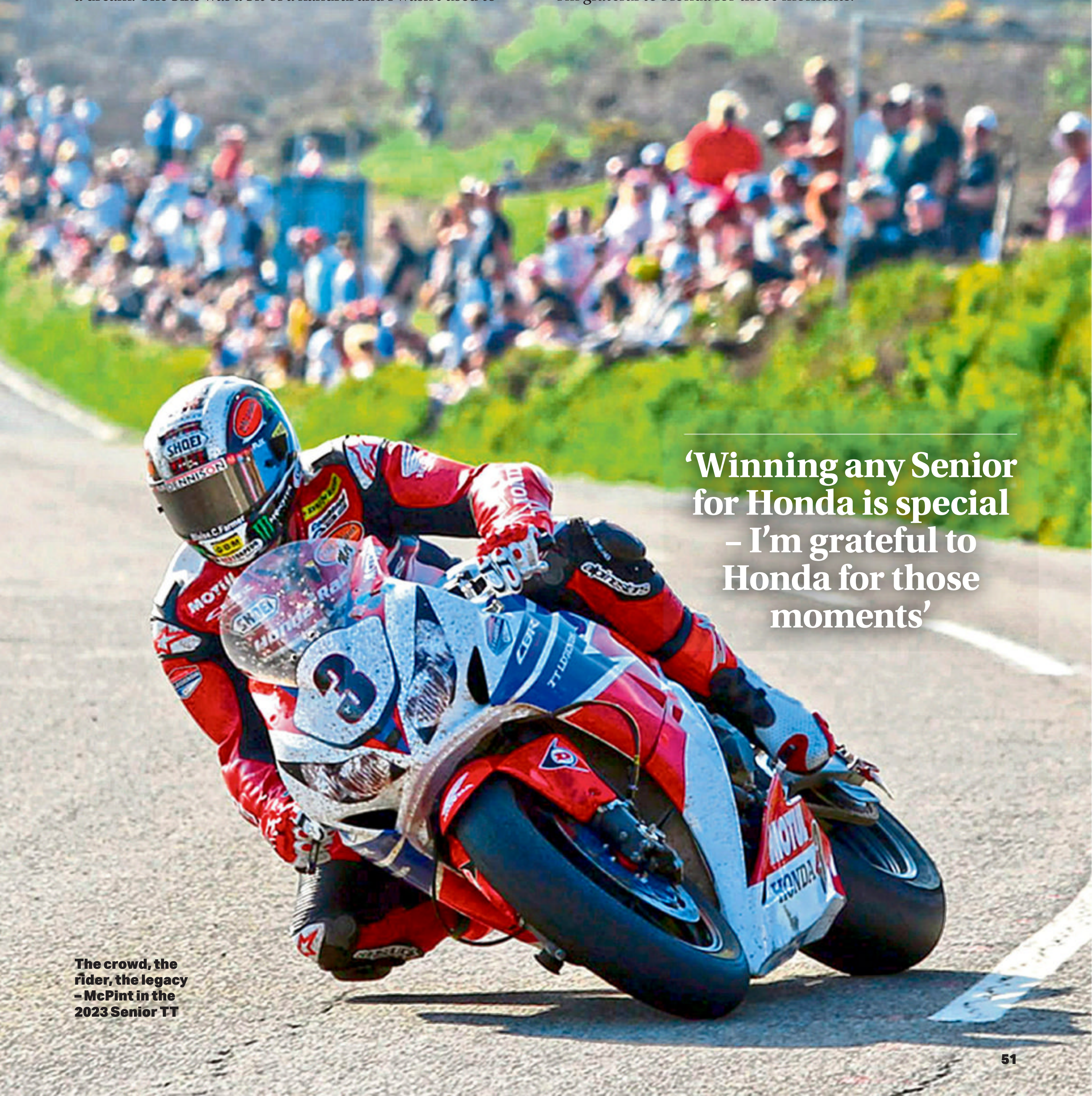
John McGuinness

» 23 TT wins » 13 on Fireblade » 19 on Hondas

'My first Honda TT ride was a little under the radar – it was in 1998 on the Vimto TSR250, that was Honda supported. By 2000 I was on the new SP-1 with Joey, so for me to be in that team was a dream. The bike was a bit of a handful and I wasn't used to four-strokes, but the team got it working for me in the end and I ended up on the rostrum, which was another dream. My first time on a superbike and I'm on the rostrum with Joey.

'I worked with Hirotoshi Honda [Mugen founder and Soichiro's son] a lot with the electric bike – he's my mate now. I could talk to him for days, extracting information about Honda from him. He had a vision and he was so dedicated. I met Mrs Honda too [Soichiro's widow, who died in 2013]. I was testing at Motegi and she was there. I went to get changed into my leathers and just pulled my pants down and she was horrified. I thought she'd be alright but she wasn't expecting that.

'Winning any Senior for Honda is special, but when you're riding round to the flag – not hanging about but not pushing – and people are waving you on, that's an amazing feeling. There are not many people who get to experience that. I'm grateful to Honda for those moments.'



'Winning any Senior for Honda is special – I'm grateful to Honda for those moments'

The crowd, the rider, the legacy – McPint in the 2023 Senior TT

Simmo and the RC45, winning the '98 Senior

Ian Simpson

» 3 Honda TT wins » BSB champion
» 5 North West 200 wins

'Honda were the best team I ever raced for. They had good mechanics, good bikes and a good budget. The bikes weren't always the best but they would work very hard to make them the best. I've got a lot of fond memories of what Honda did for me at the TT.

'After you've won you want to go and get pissed with your mates, but with Honda they always had a formal dinner with the bosses from Japan. But that's what you're getting paid for. I had the rest of my life to get drunk with my mates.

'I think I'm more well known for winning TTs rather than championships. I won the BSB title and 600 British championship in the same year, which was much harder than winning a TT, but the TT is what people remember me for. And once your name is on that TT trophy, it's there to stay, alongside Geoff Duke, Bob McIntyre and all the greats.

'In my era Honda flooded the paddock with bikes – I can remember thinking "why are they giving bikes to him? He's hopeless". But they were trying to ensure that everyone who could possibly win was on a Honda. They were spending some money...'

At St Ninian's in 2009, on the HM Plant Fireblade

Steve Plater

» 2 Honda TT wins » Honda British Supersport champion » Factory Honda BSB rider

'When I did the deal to ride for Honda at the TT in 2009 that was massive for me. It wasn't like I thought I'd made it because I was riding a factory Honda, but I was very confident in the bike, the staff, the budget, everything. I knew I had everything I needed to win so I could just concentrate on myself and my riding. That's not always the case riding for other teams.

'I didn't feel any pressure from the team – if there was any, it was nothing compared to the pressure I put on myself. The biggest difference for me was making sure I was doing everything right from a corporate point of view – I knew how massive Honda were at the TT and that everything revolved around it for the company. It was a huge part of their DNA and I had to get things right.'

> 'For me, Honda was the TT, so it's fantastic to ride for them now'

Dean **Harrison**

» 4 Honda TT wins » 33 TT podiums

‘As a kid I sat next to Robert Dunlop in the grandstand when Joey won in 2000. For me, Honda was the TT. And the factory Hondas were the best bikes, so it’s fantastic to ride for them now. I feel good in myself at the moment, we’re improving the big bike [the Fireblade] all the time, and I think Honda are in a good place, especially with the stocker [the superstock bike]. And the CBR600RR is fantastic – it does everything well.

‘I want stability and speed from my TT bike. You need stability because you need to relax between the corners. The race is so long that you can’t fight it all the time. We made some good progress with the bike [Blade] at the North West.’ And it showed at the TT: Harrison won the shortened two-lap first Superstock race, his first victory in six years, doing his quickest lap yet at 135.692mph.

Dean and Blade in Douglas, 2024 Superbike race

Jefferies and CBR600F in the 1996 Junior

Nick **Jefferies**

» 1 Honda TT win » 15 years of top 10 TT results on Hondas » Factory Honda trials rider

‘I did feel the pressure of riding for Honda, especially in the years when they had an anniversary. You knew it meant a lot to them. In 1998 they flew in Mick Doohan [500cc GP champion], Eddy Lejeune [world trials champion], Aaron Slight [factory World Superbike rider], André Malherbe [motocross champion] and Stefan Everts [another motocross champ]. Every part of Honda was there. Honda’s budget for the Isle of Man was huge.

‘One year I was asked to take a load of Honda bigwigs up to the Nursery Hotel where the first ever Honda team stayed and prepared their bikes (see p42). There were eight of them, and some were the mechanics who were there in 1959. There wasn’t much to look at but they remembered it. How amazing is that?

‘The year I won [1993], I didn’t get out of my leathers until 8pm because of the fuss Honda people were making. I went to the big party and all the Honda top brass were there, including the president of HRC. And Honda had got the 1-2-3.

‘They did a massive advert that read Honda Formula WON, with a list of Honda F1 winners – Ron Haslam, Joey, Hislop, Foggy, McCallen… and me. Back then the F1 was the one Honda prized more than any other. I was very proud to be in that company. You can never take away the fact that Honda’s racing heritage began at the Isle of Man. It will always be important to them.’

NS250R
HONDA
HONDA
Motor Cycle News
8

Blimey, I won a TT!

In 1985, *Bike* contributor **Mat Oxley** won the Production TT. It was all about momentum, flow, and being a little sly…

By Mat Oxley

I only did the TT for a holiday. In 1984 I was an *MCN* road tester and in my fifth year of racing. *MCN* were sponsoring the proddie TT, so they wanted to have a go. 'No way, too dangerous,' I said. 'What about if your only job in the fortnight is to write a story about racing there?' they replied. Sounds cushy. I'll do it!

When I got there, the course terrified me, so I was going to back out of the whole thing. Then I rode my first laps on closed roads and fell in love. I'd been going bonkers on back roads since I was a teenager and here was a place where going bonkers wasn't only legal, but encouraged.

Of course, I didn't get the two weeks off. *MCN* soon had me writing race reports and features. I'd been had, but I was happy. I finished my first TT in third place on a Suzuki RG250.

In 1985, Honda UK imported a dozen NS250Rs and gave one to me. The NS was the best bike, but there were a few fast guys on them, including Robert Dunlop and Gary Padgett.

By then I knew the course and was on winning pace in practice. The TT on those 250s was all about maintaining momentum, reducing rolling resistance and reducing drag. You needed to keep the throttle wide open, even when you wanted to ease off for this sweeper or that sweeper. Big battles between

PIC: BAUER

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Castrol
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> ‘I had that flow state going – riding on the limit, apparently effortlessly. It’s a weird, beautiful feeling’

’85 Production TT had three classes: Mat (100-250cc) shared a podium with Mick Grant (251-750cc) and Geoff Johnson (751-1500cc)

brain and right hand. You also had to be super-smooth, so you didn’t increase tyre/asphalt friction, which might cost you 0.5mph. And you stayed under the bubble – the Honda’s fuel tank battered my chest black and blue.

You also had to be sly. No one knew if the NS would do the three-lap race without refuelling, so in last practice I tried it. On lap three I pulled over, pretending I’d run dry, then continued after ‘blagging some fuel from a spectator’. The tank had a litre or so left – worth the risk. (Not everyone fell for my trick.)

I led the race but slowed too much for a downpour. Padgett and Graham Cannell, who had started ten second behind me, went by. That was it, I wasn’t going to win. I fought back anyway. Padgett, Cannell and I collided a few times, then somehow I left them behind. I had that flow state going, when your subconscious takes over. You’re riding on the limit, doing everything right, apparently effortlessly. It’s a weird, beautiful feeling.

On the final lap I got signals – +4s – which is when the terror set in: I can’t lose it now! So I pushed harder. Coming down the Mountain, I lost the front through the 33rd, a flat-out 130mph left. But I was in that flow state, so it was like I’d saved the slide before it even happened.

I won a TT – 40 years later I’m still living off it…

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[Inside]

Inside the TT paddock

The Isle of Man paddock is awash with amazing people and overflows with stories. *Bike* takes a wander through the awnings to meet the heroes of the island

By **Dan Sutherland** Photography **Stephen Davison/Pacemaker**

AJN
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38
Bathams

The veteran racer

'I made a big decision this year not to be on a Superbike for the first time in 30-odd years, which really hurt me to be honest,' admits 53-year-old Michael Rutter. The seven-time TT winner contested this year's event on a Yamaha R7 Supertwin only – giving him more time to work with his second rider, Manxman Jamie Cringle. 'Before I went out, I was thinking "what's the point" and I was a bit flat with it, but I got about halfway round and I thought thank god I haven't got a f*cking Superbike!' Rutter's first TT was in 1994, and he stood on the podium with Joey Dunlop in the 2000 Formula 1 TT race, in what would be Dunlop's final big bike win. 'When I've had enough, I just won't do it anymore, but when you're out on the bike it's just fantastic. No one can speak to you, you're on your own, and it's so cool.'

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‘It’s work and pleasure coming here – there’s a proper communal atmosphere’

Supporting the sidecars

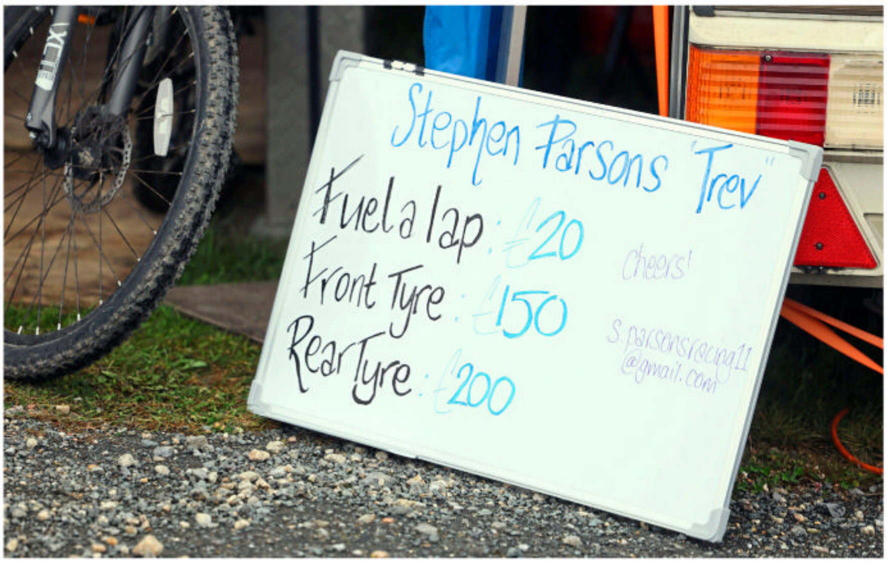
‘I’ve been to five TTs now,’ says tyre fitter James Hutchings from just outside Bath. He comes over to support the Sidecar paddock, but we caught up with him as he changed a tyre for a solo competitor. ‘It’s work and pleasure coming here. I travel up in the lorry to Heysham and come over. We’re basically the sole supplier for the Sidecars and here for the duration, to do what they need. I reckon I go through a couple of hundred tyres through the meeting. I like being in the bottom paddock – most of our teams are in this part and there’s a proper communal atmosphere.’

The man on the move

'I actually worked it out that this is my 40th year in the paddock,' says 61-year-old Jim Hunter, who comes into his 33rd TT fortnight as a travelling marshal. 'I had a break in 1992 when my son was born, but that was a great year to do it because I got to watch Steve Hislop and Carl Fogarty have that fantastic ding-dong.' The retired schoolteacher is a former competitor and now one of eight BMW S1000RR-riding responders round the course. He also assists at the pre-TT classic races and the Manx Grand Prix. 'It's a privilege to be involved in this, and just to play a tiny part is just superb. Sooner or later, that's got to come to an end, but I'll still be involved in some way or another. The build-up is really exciting on the island. I still do some days of supply at two schools, and when you ride past the paddock and see the tents and stands going up, it's really exciting.'

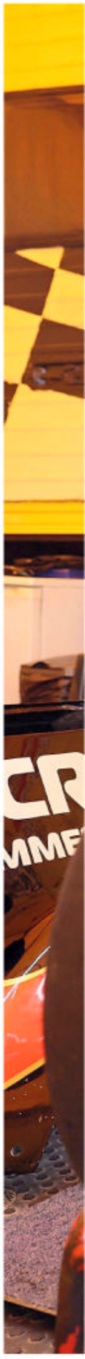
Cash for laps

For riders like privateer Stephen Parsons, £20 can go a long way – like fuelling his bike for a lap of the 37.73-mile course. 'We did it last year too. It's amazing how many people chuck in 20 quid for a lap of fuel,' he says. 'Tyres are a bit of a commitment, but last year I reckon we got 50 people helping out with fuel.' Parsons was riding in all the solo races, with TT 2025 holding a very personal challenge for him: 'I want to complete a six-lap Senior race. A couple of years ago I got very ill with cancer and that buggered me for a while. We came back three years ago and I finished a year of treatment in the April, and I came out and could only do a couple of nights of practice. A year later, we came back and did a race on the 600. I have technically done a Senior now, but last year's weather screwed us up a bit, so this year I really want a big six-lap Superbike ride because it takes some doing.'



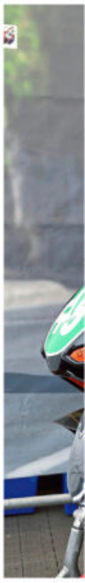
Showing Joey the ropes

One name that's synonymous with the TT paddock is Ernie Coates. The 76-year-old made his TT debut as a rider in 1975 and now supplies the paddock with tyres, spares, tools, and just about anything that's required under the Ernie Coates Racing banner. 'I came in 1974 to the Jurby road race with my brother in a sidecar,' he says. Although it's now all about four-strokes, he'd already began carrying spares for Yamaha TZ250 and 350 two-strokes while still competing himself. 'John Rea [Jonathan Rea's grandfather] gave me 350 cylinders, pistons and barrels off Joey Dunlop's bike. Joey hadn't done the TT yet, and when I gave the parts back to him when we got home, we got friendly. He came the next year and I showed him what I knew around the course, and eventually he went on and passed me!'



Chasing the century

'I came over here as a newcomer at the Manx Grand Prix in 1999,' Mark Parrett tells us. Coming into TT '25 with 92 starts, the privateer electrician planned to do all eight solo races and bow out with his ton-up. 'In 2002 I won the Senior Manx GP and in 2004 I had six top 10 TT finishes – including third in the 400 race on the bike Milky Quayle won on in 2002.' Mark competed on a 2016 BMW S1000RR that needed special dispensation to run. 'It'll be the most Superstock bike on the grid – it's still got heated grips! The first year we ran it, it had standard footpegs. We bolted them down so they couldn't tip up. It's a standard engine, but has 197bhp and unless you're Michael Dunlop you can't ride it any quicker – it just frightens you more.'



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> ‘The engineering, the physicality, and the prospect of two people working in harmony – it’s always a challenge I wanted to take on’

Thanks BRIAN HASSELL
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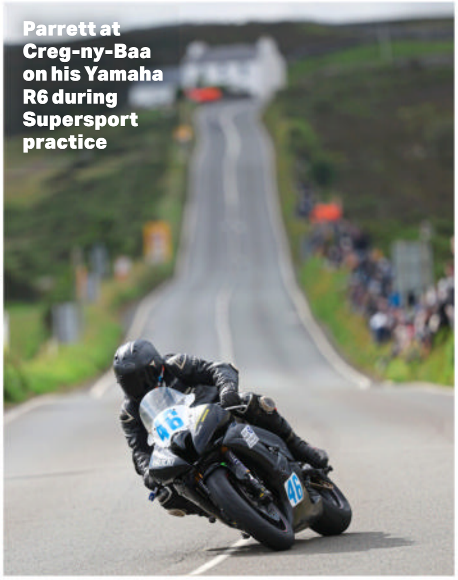
Flying as all CHAMBERS BERNIE



Parrett at Creg-ny-Baa on his Yamaha R6 during Supersport practice

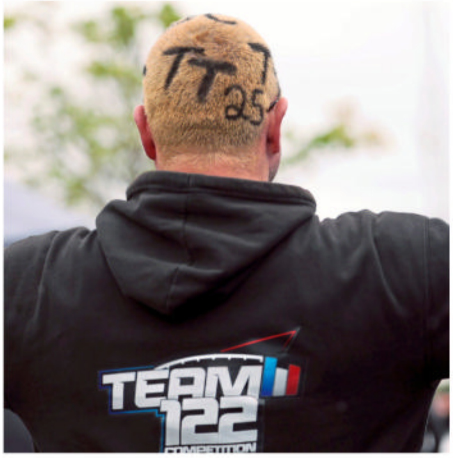
The TT never leaves you

‘My first TT was in 1986,’ tells 68-year-old Sidecar rider Gordon Shand. ‘From 1996 to 2009 I was doing European and world championship stuff, but the TT never leaves you.’ He’s showing no signs of slowing down, either. ‘This year’s outfit will be the first chassis I haven’t built myself for the TT. Everything else has always been my own.’ Shand’s Sidecar has a 2011 Suzuki GSX-R600 motor. He put hundreds of hours into the build before the TT, working out the plumbing for the electronics and the position of the engine. ‘It’s the engineering, the physicality, and the prospect of two people working in harmony,’ he says. ‘It’s always been there, and it was always a challenge I wanted to take on.’

Helping the next generation

"I started as a competitor in 1987 at the Manx Grand Prix,' says Padgett's Motorcycles team engineer, David Castle. 'I did '87, '88, '89 and '90, and then the TT from 1991-2005. I've always been a motorcycle mechanic and ran my own business for 20 years. I've been with Clive [Padgett] since 2007. It's just the best meeting in the world, simply. The circuit's the best in the world – there's nothing else like it. It's also quite special this year because we're running Mitch Rees as a newcomer. To see his face after two laps… when he came in last night, was just incredible.'

> 'I couldn't go and sit in a hedge these days – I've got to be filling a bike up with fuel'



A cut above

For Frenchman Ludovic Amette, the TT is a family affair. And he loves it so much he adopted a radical hairstyle for the event. 'I've been to two TTs, and I'm here helping one of the Sidecar teams,' he says, supporting Team 122 Compétition through the fortnight. 'I decided to cut my hair like this because we're in 2025, and my daughter's husband is riding with the number 25. You have the stars in your eyes here, because it's such a special event.'

carl cox MOTOR SPORT
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One hell of a journey

« 'I left at 5am on Saturday morning, and at 6.30am I hit a bloody deer,' says Michael Sagemueller from northern Germany. He'd driven to the event in his 1970 Citroën DS Safari, which he'd sleep in for the full fortnight. 'I had to disassemble another Citroën. I smashed my headlights, and it looks okay now, but it looked a little better before. I missed my boat and luckily got on to one the next day. I normally ride my bike, but this is the first time I've driven. I don't actually know how many kilometres the car's done – it's been round the clock and kept going.'

The lifelong fan

'We came off the midnight boat at 6am, straight to Bray Hill, and that was it,' remembers Richard Abbatt. His first trip was as a 15-year-old in 1968. 'I first got involved as a mechanic in the early '80s when I was asked if I wanted to spin a spanner or two.' For the past 20 years he's helped Dave Madsen-Mygdal, 69, who holds the record for the most starts at the TT – more than 150. 'It's a massive part of my life. Does it define you? In a way. But I couldn't go and sit in a hedge these days – I've got to be filling a bike up with fuel.'

In the control room

» 'Ultimately, it's how I earn my living,' explains the TT's head of motorsport, Paul Phillips. He grew up with the TT and last watched as a pure spectator in 2004. 'I always believed it was a sleeping giant of a sports event,' he says. 'And I feel over the past however long I've worked on it, we've progressively made progress in the right direction that has fulfilled some of what I felt that potential was.' Paul was instrumental in the rebranding of the TT post-Covid, ushering in a new era of live broadcasting that had not been previously seen on the island. 'This 120,000sqm site that we're sat in now has been being built for four weeks and I like to see that all come together.'

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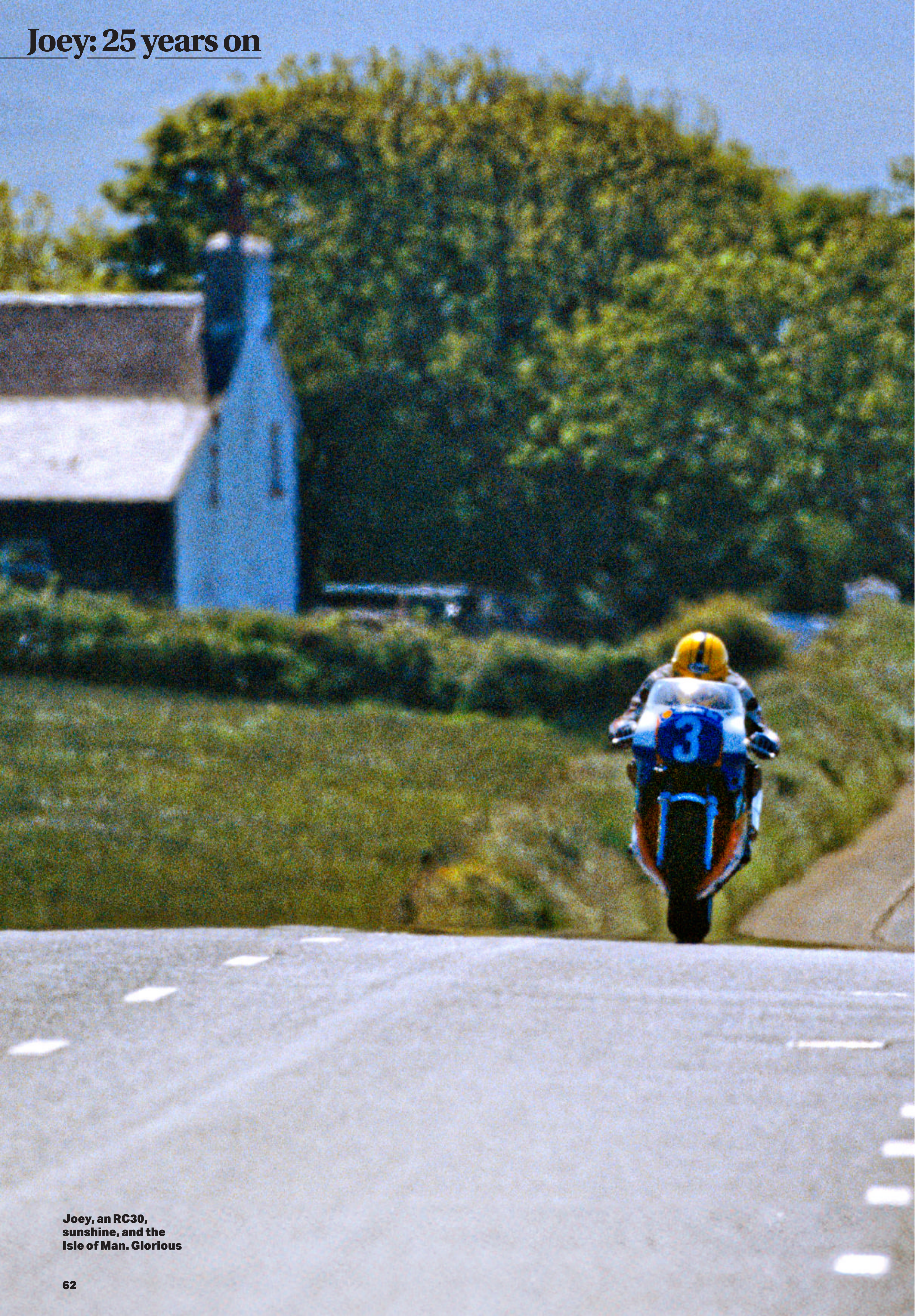

Joey, an RC30, sunshine, and the Isle of Man. Glorious

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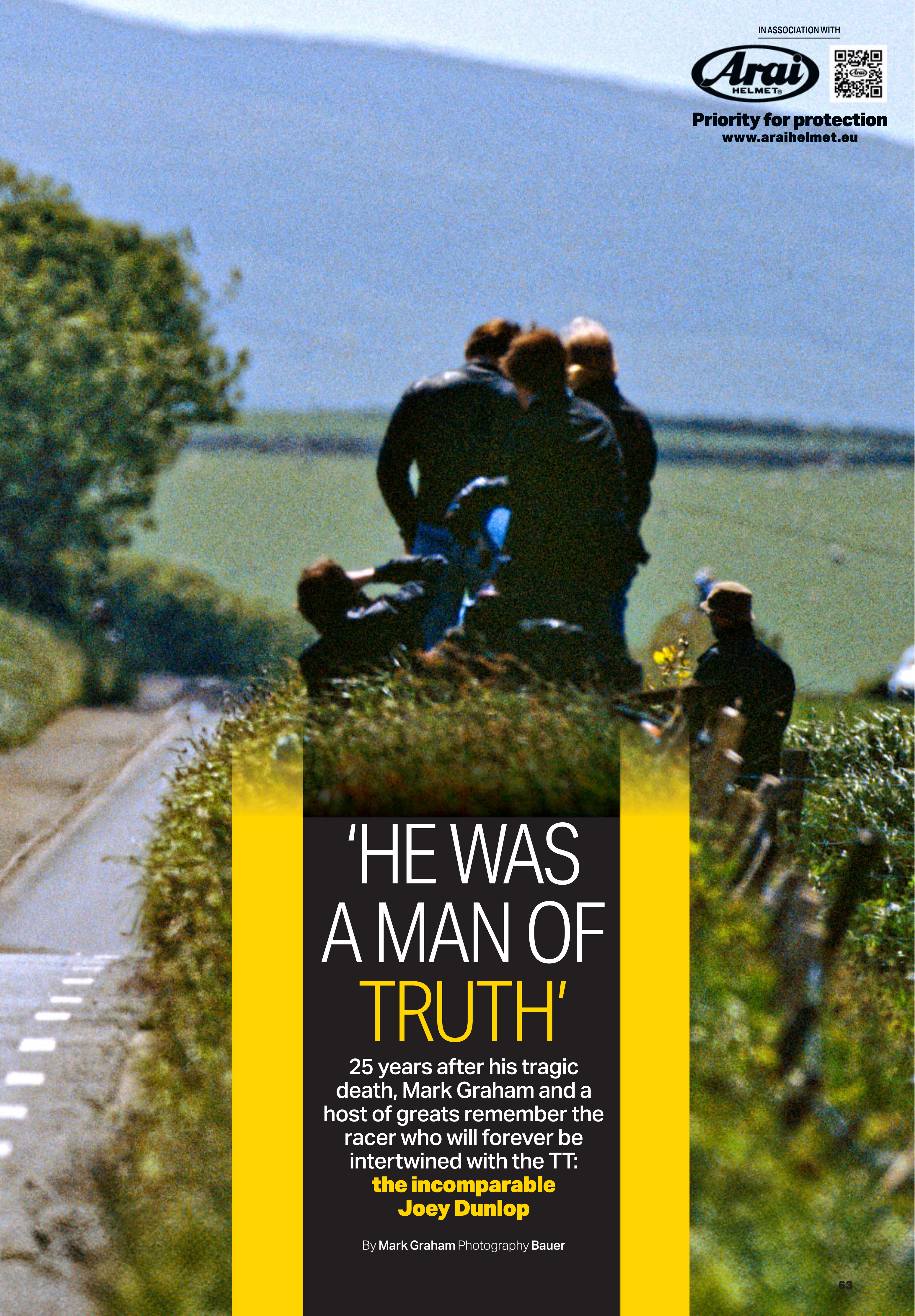


‘HE WAS A MAN OF TRUTH’

25 years after his tragic death, Mark Graham and a host of greats remember the racer who will forever be intertwined with the TT: **the incomparable Joey Dunlop**

By **Mark Graham** Photography **Bauer**

No good wondering how a man who amassed 26 Isle of Man TT wins could perish on the 4.2 miles of the Pirita-Kose-Kloostrimetsa Circuit in Estonia. Racing is dangerous. Racing on roads riskier yet.

Doesn't matter where an immovable obstacle is. A tree is a tree wherever it might be. Stone walls are stone walls regardless of location. Every rider knows that. Respects the fact.

Yet somehow Joey's demise seemed the oddest, cruellest event. A man who made pure road racing seem the most natural pursuit met his end when the negative realities of piloting anything from a 125 to a 1300cc proddie bike at speed bit awfully hard.

It happened he was on a 125. A class he began riding after the serious 1989 Brands Hatch crash that might have finished his career. His recovery took months, his attitude to racing did not waver: 'I was told it wasn't my fault, so that's okay,' he said.

Joey's death on 2 July 2000 was the starkest reminder that even the finest practitioners of a dangerous game are not immune from the worst consequences. It never seemed possible with Joey until it happened.

There seemed something other-worldly about Joey. Like all the best sportspeople he made his craft look easy, unhurried, almost gentle. If the best footballers seem always to have more time and space, the best darts players an effortless action, Joey looked relaxed and fluid on a bike.

'He was smooth,' says 11-times TT winner and a Honda teammate of Joey's, Phillip McCallen. 'He knew exactly where to be and when, and in all conditions, too.' McCallen's all-action style was absolute inverse of Joey's economic progress. A pell-mell full gallop to what seemed like Joey's measured, brisk canter.

'Joey was smart about picking his races too,' says McCallen. 'He'd maybe do five or six races at the Ulster, but he knew which ones he could win and he'd go all out in them. It might even be one race he'd target. And he'd pick his races with DJ [the late Dave Jefferies], too. Although DJ couldn't beat him when he was on form.'

Castrol
3
FUSHI
HONDA
MICHELIN
Brian Coll Racing

Defying gravity over Ballaugh Bridge, 1992

DJ's uncle Nick Jefferies, himself a TT winner, said: 'Joey was a great tactician. When he wasn't the fastest, he knew he was consistent and could win races through guile. He was a bit like the great Stanley Woods in that.' Irishman Woods won 10 TTs in the 1920s and 1930s.

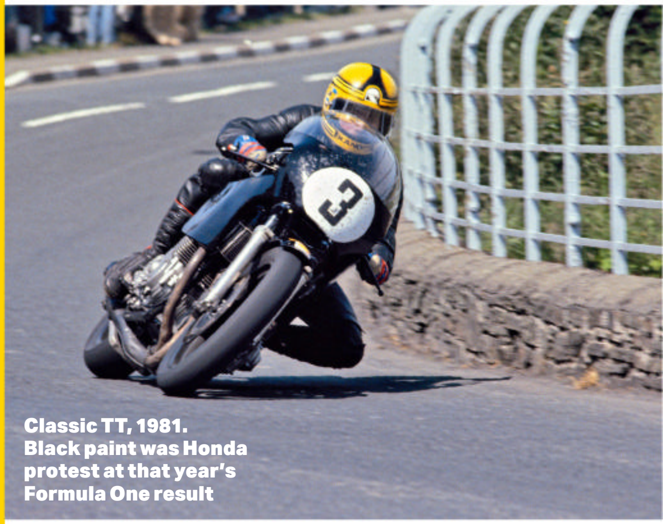
Joey wasn't a bluffer, but his relaxed paddock attitude and contrasting track behaviour could startle people. 'At our local tracks when I was just starting out, he'd turn up to run-in his new Hondas,' says Grand Prix winner Jeremy McWilliams. 'You'd think he wasn't interested, his lap times weren't that fast… then in the main 250 race he'd just smoke everyone.'

Joey's reasons for riding number three at the TT were typically cogent: 'The first bike always gets the birds,' he said. 'If I go at number three I miss that, the marshals are all alert, and if I can get past the first two riders I've got nobody in front. I like an open road so I can go as quick as I can without having to pass people.'

Joey's race craft was key, as was his meticulous machine prep. 'He hardly ever retired from a race,' said Jefferies. 'I first ran into him in 1975 at the Skerries 100 when he was still Joe Dunlop. This scruffy local Irish lad who could ride amazingly

HONDA
FERODO

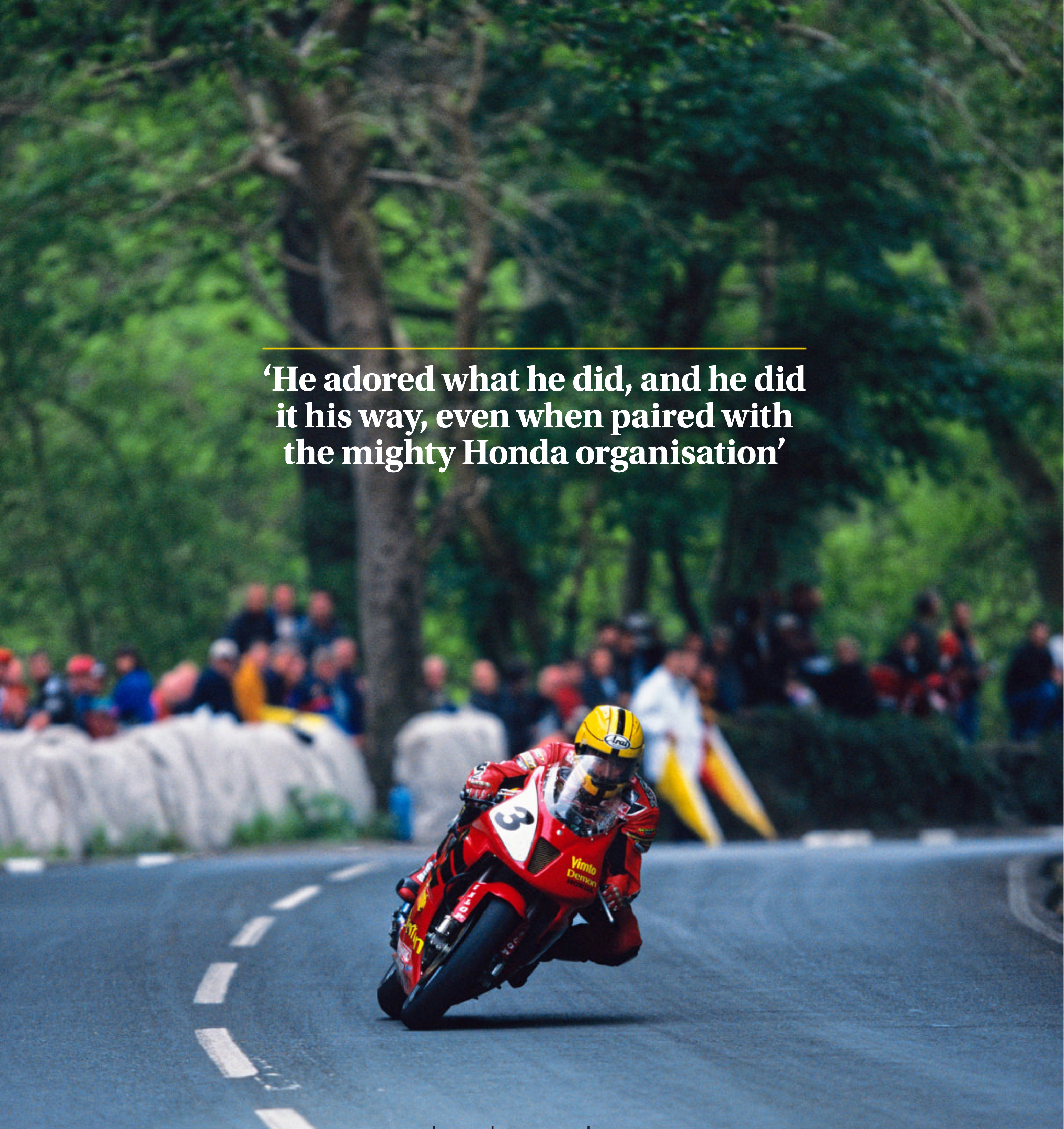
With Philip McCallen, 1991. Trying to remember what time the party finished last night



Classic TT, 1981. Black paint was Honda protest at that year's Formula One result

Mischievous glint suggests he inked the camera's viewfinder before this was taken

> 'He talked to you with his eyes, if you were smart enough to pick it up. You could see what he thought by his face, his body language'



> ‘He adored what he did, and he did it his way, even when paired with the mighty Honda organisation’

Joey by numbers

» His tally of significant roads wins is testament to his domination of the 1980s and 1990s. Only his nephew Michael Dunlop has now amassed more TT victories. Joey won 24 Ulster Grands Prix on anything from 125 tiddlers to 1000cc Superbikes and everything in between. He won 13 North West 200s, five TT F1 World Championships, and we haven't even touched on the countless Tandragee, Cookstown, Skerries, or Killalane triumphs. Behind the relaxed demeanour was an efficient and almost merciless winning machine.

Joey leads Niall Mackenzie (9) at the NW200

RS125, 1993. Lid/bike colour combo never been bettered

Guthrie's, RC45, 1997. Birds long gone

quickly. He was fast and he always got his bikes going well. It didn't matter what they looked like – him or the bike – but they were fast and reliable.'

And he set them up exactly as he wished, even when he was a factory Honda rider: 'You're setting them up so they're easy to ride, almost soft, so they handle well at the TT.' No one could argue with the results.

As Joey's mechanic the late Jackie Graham said: 'He'd been rebuilding engines since he was 10. He was extremely dedicated – in his own way.' And his own way was precisely what made Joey so appealing as a top rider. When the competition were currying media favour, Joey was busy saying very little.

Not that he didn't have the ear of the press. During TT fortnight he could regularly be found in The Saddle, in Queen Street, just behind the North Quay of Douglas Harbour deep in conversation with the late Norrie Whyte of *MCN*. There was more ale drunk than shorthand notes taken, but the connection was there.

Other riders would struggle to understand the very singular Joey. He was not a gregarious character. His circle of friends was small and very tight, and he kept it that way. 'All those wild parties,' said Jefferies. 'They were closed shop affairs. Once he trusted me we got on, but he was quite a guarded man.'

McWilliams remembers a man who liked a pint; a social drinker. 'We were standing in the Mondello café at lunchtime on race day,' he said. 'And Joey was having a pint. We still had a couple of races to go.'

His relationship with McCallen was slow burn. 'When I started to do well in 1984/5,' said McCallen, 'I knew him to say hello to and the first time I beat him in 1988 I think he respected me from then. I had a new 250 that year then broke my foot at the North West 200, so I lent him some bits for his 250.

'I was supposed to join Honda for 1989, but they had too many riders so I went to Kawasaki, but it wasn't really working out. I called into his bar and we were sitting there talking – he'd had his Brands crash and he said, "Phillip, you should have my bikes. I'll ring Honda in the morning". He did – and then I was a Honda rider. He was a man of truth.'

If he had spare parts he'd lend them out in the paddock, and even take bits off his own bike to loan if required. But Joey's greatest deeds were performed at a steady 60mph in his Merc van en route to the war-torn Balkans in eastern Europe to distribute clothes and other necessities.

These were long hauls. He'd sleep in the back of the van, on a bench propped across the floor by the rear doors. He'd eat tinned soup, blithely traverse war zones and cross hostile borders to deliver his precious cargo.

He did it time and again to no fanfare, for no reward save that of improving the lives of innocent victims of dumb wars. He would no doubt have preferred his actions to have gone unnoticed, but he was made an OBE for his efforts in 1996 to go with his 1986 MBE for mere success on a motorcycle.

He never said much because, unlike many people, he never thought he had to. Almost monosyllabic in unfamiliar company, he was only slightly more voluble with those he knew. 'He hardly talked at all,' recalled Ron Haslam. 'You could watch telly and have a cup of tea with him and if you got a couple of words you'd be doing well.'

McCallen again: 'He talked to you with his eyes, if you were smart enough to pick it up. You could see what he thought by his face, his body language. And he was mischievous when he was relaxed. He literally stole my wife at my wedding when there was a white Gold Wing there for me and the bride. Next thing you knew he was away up the road on it with her on the back.'

He was the consummate roads rider. 'He was fast on the fast bits,' said Nick Jefferies. 'He was careful on the brakes, very safe on braking, and always slow into turns and fast out, so quick on the big corners.' No one makes up time on slow corners, it's the fast turns that separate the aces from the also-rans. Joey knew that from day one on a 200cc Triumph Tiger Cub.

Joey attracted fans to roads racing because he made a dangerous sport look like an art form, because he was as down to earth as the fella next to you in the crowd, because he was his own man and cared not a hoot for pomp or hoopla.

He adored what he did, and he did it his way, even when paired with the mighty Honda organisation.

The great Spanish bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguin said: 'Death is only a risk. The risk is the very essence of life itself.' All the finest hard sports stars know that – from boxers, to mountaineers, to motorcycle racers. Joey knew it.

Left: Honda SP-1, 2000 Formula One TT. Joey's greatest win, celebrated overleaf

Year of Yer Maun

25 years ago, Joey Dunlop completed a hat-trick at the TT, including arguably his greatest win: the 2000 Formula 1 at the age of 48. He was killed just three weeks later

By **Mike Armitage**

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ISLE OF MAN TT

The greatest of the greats

'Legendary' is an over-used word, but it's the only one which can adequately describe Joey Dunlop

BY ADAM MORRISSEY

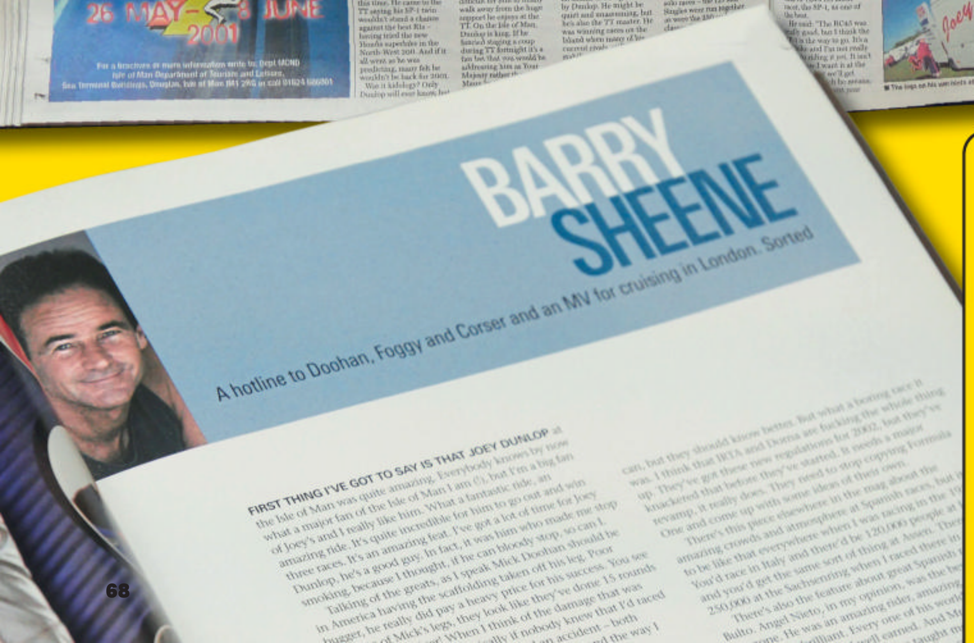
Dunlop's first TT win was in 1977, so he knows how to open a bottle of champers in style

RESPECT FROM OTHER TT LEGENDS

CARL FOGARTY

STEVE HISLOP

PHIL McCALLEN



BARRY SHEENE

A hotline to Doohan, Foggy and Corser and an MV for cruising in London. Sorted

FIRST THING I'VE GOT TO SAY IS THAT JOEY DUNLOP at the Isle of Man was quite amazing. Everybody knows by now what a major fan of the Isle of Man I am (!), but I'm a big fan of Joey's and I really like him. What a fantastic ride, an amazing ride. It's quite incredible for him to go out and win three races. It's an amazing feat. I've got a lot of time for Joey Dunlop, he's a good guy. In fact, it was him who made me stop smoking, because I thought, if he can bloody stop, so can I.

Talking of the greats, as I speak Mick Doohan should be in America having the scaffolding taken off his leg. Poor bugger, he really did pay a heavy price for his success.

can, but they should know better. But what a boring race it was. I think that IRTA and Dorna are fucking the whole thing up. They've got these new regulations for 2002, but they've knackered that before they've started. It needs a major revamp, it really does. They need to stop copying Formula One and come up with some ideas of their own.

Everyone's favourite

» 'Joey Dunlop at the Isle of Man was quite amazing,' said Barry Sheene in his *Bike* column. 'A fantastic ride.' Joey's rivals were equally gushing. 'How could I go home and say I've been beaten by a 48-year-old man?' said Phil McCallen. 'There'll never be another TT rider like him.' Having first won a TT in 1977 (the Jubilee Classic, Yamaha TZ750), Joey did his fastest-ever lap 23 years later in his final big-bike TT, averaging 123.87mph in the Senior.

The one and only

» The impact of Joey's Formula 1 win on Honda's unfancied SP-1 is underlined by the *MCN* front cover. Only one story mattered. Honda's celebration advert didn't show the bike, but Joey, while *Bike*'s usual scattergun of news titbits gave way for a full-page story – the 48-year-old publican winning the big bike race really was the stuff of fairy tales.

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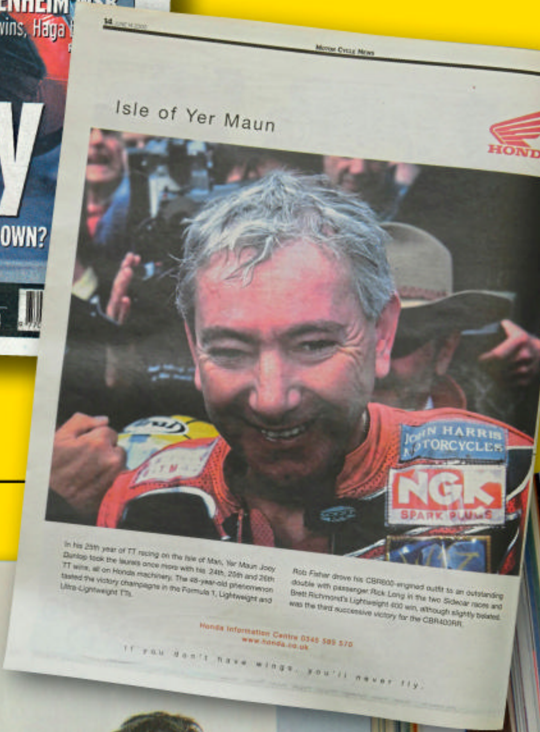

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Motor Cycle News

Isle of Yer Maun

HONDA
JOHN HARRIS MOTORCYCLES
NGK SPARK PLUGS

In his 25th year of TT racing on the Isle of Man, Yer Maun Joey Dunlop took the laurels once more with his 24th, 25th and 26th TT wins, all on Honda machinery. The 48-year-old phenomenon tasted the victory champagne in the Formula 1, Lightweight and Ultra-Lightweight TTs.

Rob Fisher drove his CBR600-engined outfit to an outstanding double with passenger Rick Long in the two Sidecar races and Brett Richmond's Lightweight 400 win, although slightly belated, was the third successive victory for the CBR400RR.

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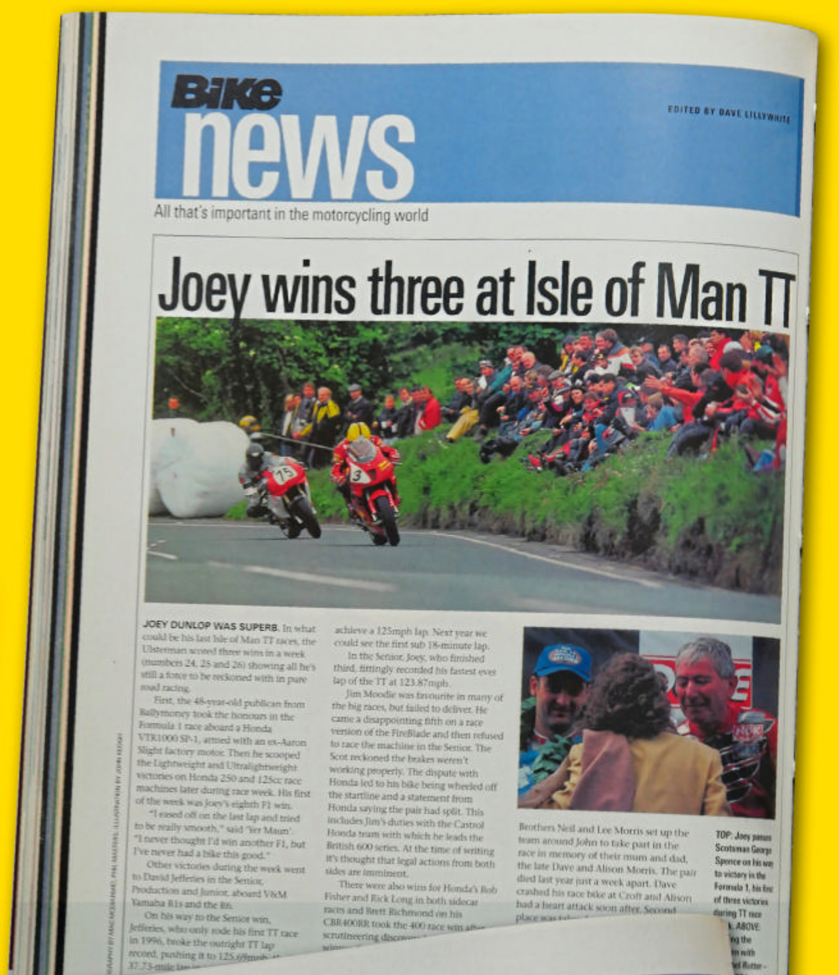
If you don't have wings, you'll never fly.



Bike news

EDITED BY DAVE LILLYWHITE

All that's important in the motorcycling world

Joey wins three at Isle of Man TT

JOEY DUNLOP WAS SUPERB. In what could be his last Isle of Man TT races, the Ulsterman scored three wins in a week (numbers 24, 25 and 26) showing all he's still a force to be reckoned with in pure road racing.

First, the 48-year-old publican from Ballymoney took the honours in the Formula 1 race aboard a Honda VTR1000 SP-1, armed with an ex-Aaron Slight factory motor. Then he scooped the Lightweight and Ultralightweight victories on Honda 250 and 125cc race machines later during race week. His first of the week was Joey's eighth F1 win.

"I eased off on the last lap and tried to be really smooth," said 'Yer Maun'. "I never thought I'd win another F1, but I've never had a bike this good."

Other victories during the week went to David Jefferies in the Senior, Production and Junior, aboard V&M Yamaha R1s and the R6.

On his way to the Senior win, Jefferies, who only rode his first TT race in 1996, broke the outright TT lap record, pushing it to 125.69mph

achieve a 125mph lap. Next year we could see the first sub 18-minute lap.

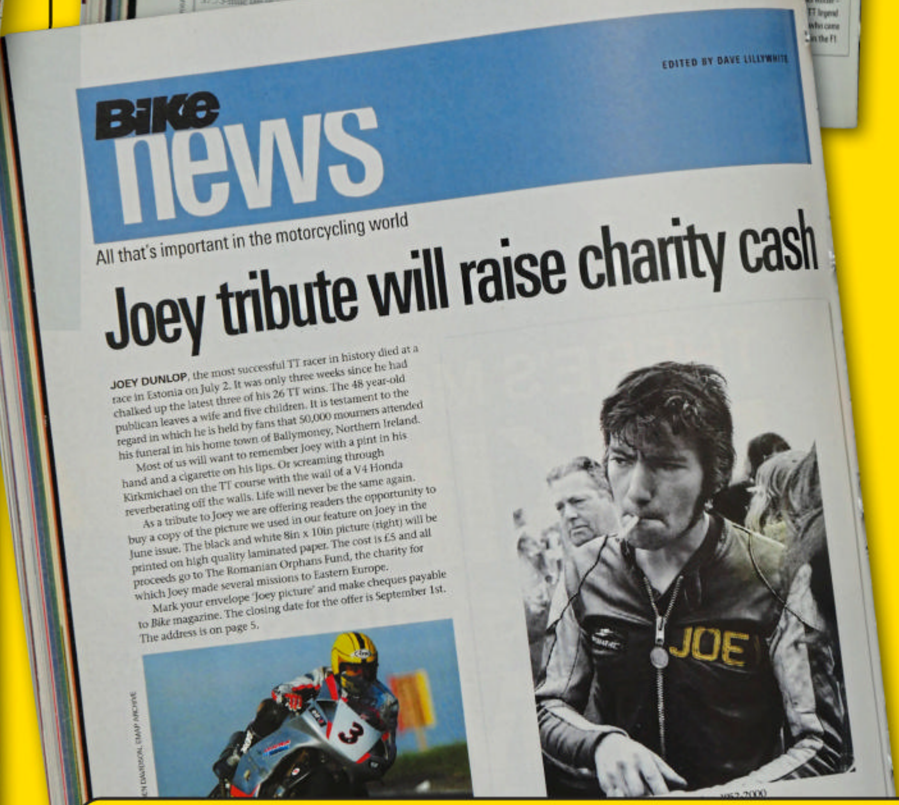
In the Senior, Joey, who finished third, fittingly recorded his fastest ever lap of the TT at 123.87mph.

Jim Moodie was favourite in many of the big races, but failed to deliver. He came a disappointing fifth on a race version of the FireBlade and then refused to race the machine in the Senior. The Scot reckoned the brakes weren't working properly. The dispute with Honda led to his bike being wheeled off the startline and a statement from Honda saying the pair had split. This includes Jim's duties with the Castrol Honda team with which he leads the British 600 series. At the time of writing it's thought that legal actions from both sides are imminent.

There were also wins for Honda's Rob Fisher and Rick Long in both sidecar races and Brett Richmond on his CBR400RR took the 400 race win after scrutineering

Brothers Neil and Lee Morris set up the team around John to take part in the race in memory of their mum and dad, the late Dave and Alison Morris. The pair died last year just a week apart. Dave crashed his race bike at Croft and Alison had a heart attack soon after. Second

TOP: Joey passes Scotsman George Spence on his way to victory in the Formula 1, his first of three victories during TT race



EDITED BY DAVE LILLYWHITE

Bike news

All that's important in the motorcycling world

Joey tribute will raise charity cash

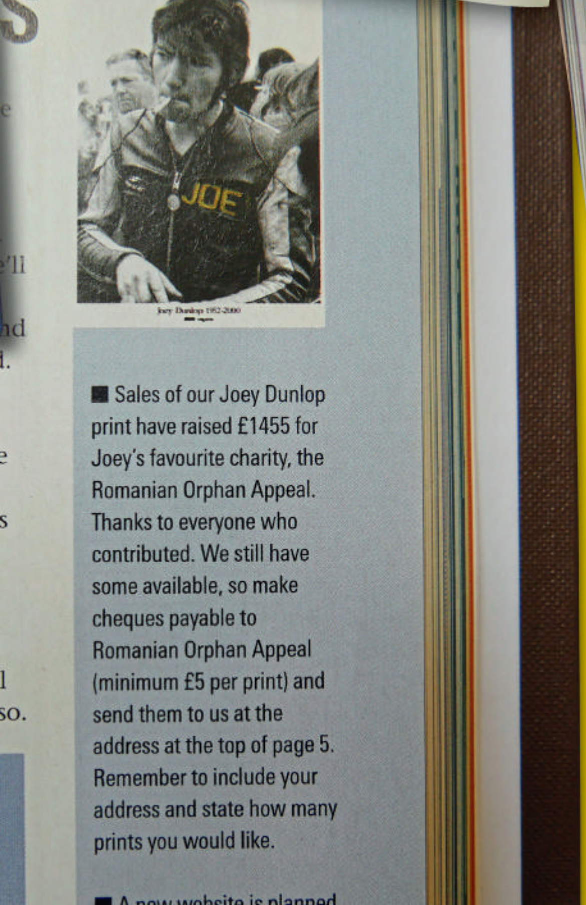
JOEY DUNLOP, the most successful TT racer in history died at a race in Estonia on July 2. It was only three weeks since he had chalked up the latest three of his 26 TT wins. The 48 year-old publican leaves a wife and five children. It is testament to the regard in which he is held by fans that 50,000 mourners attended his funeral in his home town of Ballymoney, Northern Ireland.

Most of us will want to remember Joey with a pint in his hand and a cigarette on his lips. Or screaming through Kirkmichael on the TT course with the wail of a V4 Honda reverberating off the walls. Life will never be the same again.

As a tribute to Joey we are offering readers the opportunity to buy a copy of the picture we used in our feature on Joey in the June issue. The black and white 8in x 10in picture (right) will be printed on high quality laminated paper. The cost is £5 and all proceeds go to The Romanian Orphans Fund, the charity for which Joey made several missions to Eastern Europe.

Mark your envelope 'Joey picture' and make cheques payable to Bike magazine. The closing date for the offer is September 1st. The address is on page 5.

1952-2000



Joey Dunlop 1952-2000

■ Sales of our Joey Dunlop print have raised £1455 for Joey's favourite charity, the Romanian Orphan Appeal. Thanks to everyone who contributed. We still have some available, so make cheques payable to Romanian Orphan Appeal (minimum £5 per print) and send them to us at the address at the top of page 5. Remember to include your address and state how many prints you would like.

■ A new website is planned

Goodbye to a hero

» I was taking a lunchtime power nap at my engineering job when my gaffer walked in and said Joey had been killed racing in Estonia. I'd never met Joey – I'd never been to the TT – yet I distinctly recall getting upset. Something had changed in our world; it would never be the same. 50,000 mourners attended Joey's funeral in Ballymoney, Northern Ireland. As a tribute, *Bike* offered a print of when he was just 'Joe Dunlop'. They were £5 each with all proceeds to the Romanian Orphans Appeal. You raised £1455 for his favourite charity.

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Pour toutes les routes

Or, put another way, the latest all-round sports tourers flogged across that there France. The new Triumph Tiger Sport 800 and updated Yamaha Tracer 9 GT and BMW F900XR go on a mini-break

By **Jim Moore** Photography **Adam Shorrock**

Tiger Sport 800, F900XR, Tracer 9 GT, and some pleasingly curvy Frenchness

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Fruity performance, continent-dispensing comfort, engaging handling, plus enough tech and gadgets for an easy life. What's not to like? Sports tourers always used to run the risk of being a bit nowt-nor-summat – jacks of too many trades – but today's staggering design and engineering mean the current upright examples of the genre are truly inspiring.

Yamaha's Tracer 9 (like the 900 before it) is the recognised benchmark in the 'middleweight' area, and this year's reconfigured GT version has a new bling-per-quid ratio. But it's got potent competition: first from a reinvigorated BMW F900XR that sports a finer spec and the option of dazzling colours; and secondly from the fresh Triumph Tiger Sport 800, which appears to be like the British firm's greatest hits package and seriously impressed in our single-bike test (June issue).

Clearly, the only way to decide which is best is to grab a toothbrush and spare pants, and head for four days of French autoroutes, country roads, mountains passes and sunshine.

BMW F900XR

Bold colours, pumped-up spec and the promise of being better value than ever. If you're the right size and shape…

Above: use of matching helmet not compulsory

Left: chunky, easy to understand, plus a bit that spins round

DYNAMIC PRO
0 mph
N
11:02AM
+22°C
BMW Motorrad
NAVIGATION

Below: dash has connectivity for navigation… so, er…

We're only 20 French miles into a four-day romp to the Alsace region, yet it's clear that guest tester Gary Hartshorne is already in trouble. He's moving around on the F900XR like a cat on a hot tin roof, unable to find comfort in the BMW's ergonomics. That or he forgot his Preparation H. But we're a long way from our overnighter in Reims so we plough on for a further 100 miles, much to his obvious displeasure.

Finally we stop. Gary, who holds a PhD in profanity, wastes no time in offloading his thoughts about the XR. 'That seat is like having a red-hot poker rammed up your nipsy,' he winces, holding the remains of his backside in his hands. 'Sports tourer? My arse – literally…' To be fair, fellow tester Chris Newbigging made clear the BMW's shortcomings prior to Gary's stint on the hot seat, having already suffered its perch from Peterborough to Folkestone.

Blame lies with the relationship between the XR's high-ish 'bars, low seat (with little room to wriggle back) and cramped footpeg positioning that, over distance, is far from ideal. Nor is a 15.5-litre tank. At autoroute pace it's getting ready to trigger the fuel light after 120 miles. But at least it's cause to stop. The Triumph and Yamaha have the capacity and comfort to grind out a further 60 miles before juicing.

Once brimmed, the XR becomes my perch. I'm not looking forward to the next autoroute stint but, as the miles click by, it's clear that height and size played their part in Gary's discomfort. Being slightly shorter and lighter, I find the BMW's seating manageable rather than punishing, and the manually adjustable screen creates less buffeting and noise than experienced by my loftier colleague. Given the choice, I'd still rather be on the Tiger or Tracer, mind…

New day, new roads. I'm XR-mounted again but having swapped autoroutes for rural tarmac – and having switched from Road to Dynamic mode – I'm starting to understand why editor Armitage has a soft spot for this German twin. Away from the monotony of cruise-controlled purgatory (cruise is a £360 standalone extra, or part of the optional £835 Comfort Pack), the XR really steps up to the plate.

> 'The semi-active shock is certainly way better than the Triumph's'

Along the D7 from La Bourgonce to Les Rouges-Eaux, the BMW displays its mischievous side. Myriad tight turns, short straights and track-spec tarmac help flip my previous opinion of the XR on its head. Apexes become our quarry and the firmly damped 900 obliges at every turn, giving the sweet-steering Tiger a run for its dosh through the road's more complex sections.

After a few kilometres of rapid-fire switchbacks even Gary's falling for the XR's sportier charms. 'Now it makes sense,' he reckons. 'On twisty mountain roads it's more agile than the Yamaha. There's plenty of feedback from both brakes and chassis – the semi-active shock is certainly way better than the Triumph's.'

It's not only the BMW's handling and stopping power that impresses – its 895cc parallel-twin engine pulls its weight, too. On paper 103bhp may not sound that impressive but its rorty drive is underpinned by almost 70 lb.ft of torque (same as the Yam), giving overtakes and off-corner grunt real bite. For most roads this motor is more than enough. If you need more, look at an S1000XR.

Despite coming into its own on the sort of roads sports tourers were made for – and even forcing Gary to eat his earlier words – Chris remains unconvinced by the F900XR. 'First off,' he says, like a headmaster about to give an unruly child a proper dressing down, 'no sports tourer should be *that* uncomfortable over distance. That, surely, is half of its supposed capability. Also, the starting price of £10,890 sounds okay, especially against the Yamaha at £14,354 – but they're base prices.

'For an XR in this spec with all the desirable bits – Sport colours, Comfort and Dynamic Packs, tyre monitoring, SOS call, centrestand, and panniers – it's the most expensive here, and £730 more than the high-spec Tracer. For a bike that struggles at half of its remit that's far too salty a price to swallow.'

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Pay for your BMW F900XR

bmw-motorrad.co.uk

» **CASH PRICE:** £13,540 as tested. Panniers (£848) and satnav (£700) included on test bike but not in BMW finance quote

» **PCP** Deposit £2750, 36 monthly payments £156.36, optional final payment £6042.24, (4000 miles, 2.9% APR, total £14,264.84)

» **HP** Deposit £2750, 36 months £313.13, total £14,023.68 (2.9% APR)

Made for roads like this. Less so for long straight bits

Above: trim, light, good at this sort of caper

Left: does the job, but doesn't feel as classy as other two

Below: in-your-face reminder that BMW and Yamaha are more luxurious

This shot would be even more amazing with a yellow one...

Pay for your Tiger Sport 800

triumphmotorcycles.co.uk

» **CASH PRICE:** £12,482 (as tested)

» **PCP:** Deposit £2496, 36 monthly payments £166.60, optional final payment £5866.25 (4000 miles, 7.9% APR, total £14,359.85)

» **HP:** Deposit £2496, 36 months £311.18, total £13,699.48 (7.9% APR)

Triumph Tiger Sport 800

Take all the things Triumph are good at, toss them into one pan and simmer gently. The new 800 is, surely, a recipe for greatness...

'My heart sank when I first saw the Triumph,' declares Gary, who assumed the BMW would be better on account of its retina-assaulting colours. 'It looks a generation behind the others even though it's a new model and, if I'm honest, a bit cheap.

'But I was way too hasty to make those assumptions. In many ways it's the best bike here – best value, most comfortable, lightest, sweetest handling. It's the surprise of the three.'

Up against a benchmark Yamaha dripping in tech and wafted along by one of Japan's finest engines in years, plus a German that's had the BMW parts and trinkets catalogue thrown at it, the drab-looking Triumph (yellow is a way better option) seemed like an also-ran, here to make up the numbers. Never judge a bike by its paint job...

While the Tiger Sport 800 doesn't do bells or whistles – its level of tech is useful, rather than mind-boggling – what it does offer is far from skin-deep. At a claimed 214kg fuelled up, the Triumph is the lightest as well as the second most powerful (the Tracer's 4bhp advantage is wiped out by its 17kg deficit). And so on the road – any road – the Tiger feels the most urgent and agile of the trio.

Unsurprisingly it's also the most compact, sporting a wheelbase 78mm shorter than the Tracer and 101mm stumpier than the F900XR. Even so, the Triumph isn't cramped. Gary, perhaps giddy on mountain air, describes it as 'maybe the most comfortable bike he's ever ridden,' and Chris states: 'If I can pick one bike for the ride home it'd be the Tiger.' High praise indeed.

Away from autoroutes the Triumph becomes the one we all want to ride, especially when the roads rise and twist their way to well beyond 1000 metres above sea level. Over lunch at the snowless Lac Blanc ski resort Chris makes no secret of his admiration of the 800. 'It's a perfect combination of the other two – comfortable over distance, yet proper up for it when you finally get to proper corners,' he says while pushing

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pungent-smelling cheese around his plate. 'It's the best value too, but Triumph should consider a higher spec option with a full-on TFT dash, better suspension, and more tech to really bloody Yamaha's nose.'

Despite being riotous fun on pretty much every road we point it at, the Tiger would be improved dramatically by higher-quality rear suspension. The Showa shock lets down an otherwise belting package, losing its damping control all too quickly when pushed. Boosting both preload and rebound simply slows the rate at which the damping degrades. Given the 800's wallet-friendly price, investing in a quality aftermarket unit from the get-go would be a smart move, particularly if you ride two-up.

> **'I'm falling harder for the Triumph with every turn'**

From its junction with the D148 to Saint-Dié-des-Vosges and our hotel, the D415 is a glorious, winding, 16-mile tarmac gift, cutting across deep valley floors and up colossal hillsides that dwarf everything below. I'm Tiger-mounted, glued to the rear wheel of Gary on the BMW. The pace is keen, many corners blind, yet I'm filled with confidence in the 800's ability to dispatch every turn with aplomb. Even the shock's playing ball, given the road's bowling green smooth surface. This is sports-touring nirvana, and I'm falling harder for the Triumph with every turn.

Let's be picky. I'd like a touch more drive below 4000rpm – the Tracer's the stronger triple lower down – but above that the Triumph's 798cc mill is a joyous mechanical masterpiece, fuelling perfectly right through to five figures. Three engine modes (Road, Rain and Sport) are more than enough for every occasion, and standard equipment includes cornering ABS, an up/down quickshifter, cruise control (an option on the BMW), phone connectivity, switchable traction control, an adjustable screen, daytime running lights, and LED lighting. Plus Triumph offer an optional Akrapovic silencer to unleash the full aural delight of its three-pot symphony. Not bad at all... but it just isn't presented as luxuriously as on the Yamaha or BMW (much of what's on our test XR are added extras, granted).

In this company the more we ride the Tiger, the more we like it. Thinking with our heads it's the one we'd all buy – it's the best value, most exciting to ride, and finest handling. But there's a chance the accomplished Tracer could still rule our hearts...

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Pay for your Tracer 9 GT

you-yamaha-finance.co.uk

» **CASH PRICE:** £14,354 on the road

» **PCP:** Deposit £2870, 36 monthly payments £191.59, optional final payment £7203.75 (4000 miles, 9.4% APR, total £16,970.99)

» **HP:** Deposit £2870, 36 months £365.28, total £16,020.08 (9.4% APR)

Handles like it's near rails (sorry)

Yamaha Tracer 9 GT

Multiple test winner, showroom hit, the standard by which upright all-rounders are judged – and still able to hold its head very high

Above: more lights than a Mk2 Escort in a night rally

Right: this lot's like a mini-gym for your left thumb

STREET
0
MPH
N
GEAR
1094 mile
YAMAHA

Below: remember the old split screens? This is so much nicer

I can hear him from a quarter of a mile away. We're high on the hills above Orbey and Chris has nipped off on the Tracer for a cheeky spin; now he's returning at pace. The raspy howl of the three-cylinder motor ricochets off roadside cliffs before reverberating around the valley like a wailing banshee. Now in view he attacks a right-hand hairpin as if the gendarmerie are in hot pursuit. Fortunately, however, the French old bill are nowhere to be seen. It's just what happens when you show the Tracer 9 GT a road with curves.

The Yamaha simply shouldn't be this good. Next to the Tiger Sport 800 and F900XR it's unquestionably more 'tourer' than 'sports', yet as a package it's so well-balanced and fluid in its relationship between engine and chassis that once the straight-line miles have been ticked off it can confidently lift up its skirt and party with the best of them.

Chris is back from his quick thrash and his grin says it all. 'Did you hear the pegs grinding out?' he asks. Actually, we noticed the showers of sparks first…

Yamaha has shuffled its Tracer pack for 2025, making the premium GT+ now a semi-auto-only offering. The GT is now the manual six-speeder, with Y-AMT transmission available as an option for an extra grand. Auto gearboxes have their place, especially if you conduct your touring two-up at a more laid-back, leisurely pace. But Yamaha's two-way quickshifter, as fitted to our GT, is so slick and effective that changing manually is almost as effortless.

'I'd feel cheated if this was an auto,' muses Chris following his blast on the Yam. 'A big part of the joy of the Tracer is using that motor, and a manual 'box is the best way to do that.' Flicking the GT into Sport helps, too. Not only does it switch the motor to its most responsive mapping, it also firms the semi-active suspension for the fun and frolics ahead.

'For a big bike, it turns really well,' offers Gary after his time tonking up and down the mountain on the GT. 'It's a bit bigger and heavier than the other two, but because of its low centre of gravity it flicks through turns like a pendulum. Of the three it feels the most secure and its ride quality is mega – really plush.'

We're big fans of the Tracer 9 GT+ here at *Bike*. Regular contributor Martin Fitz-Gibbons described it as perhaps the best sports tourer ever to emerge from Japan. The GT lacks a few of the +'s luxuries (radar-assisted cruise control being the biggie) but at no point on this trip does this model feel lacking. It's actually got the same premium feel as its slightly posher stablemate, but for almost £3000 less.

And unlike the BMW and Triumph, you don't need to add extras to the GT. You get all the goodies as standard: LED Matrix headlamps that automatically control main beam; hill start control; a 7in TFT display with integrated Garmin satnav; semi-active KYB suspension; keyless ignition, five riding modes (two of them customisable); an electric screen; adjustable cruise control; heated grips; plus electrically locking panniers with their own interior lights.

All this in-built gadgetry gives the GT a luxurious feel – much more than the Triumph – and goes a long way to justifying its £14,000-plus price tag. But the real jewel in the Tracer's crown remains its mechanical marvel of a motor. No other engine currently available makes better use of 117bhp and 70 lb.ft or so of torque. There's instant punch from any revs, the fuelling is deliciously crisp and responsive, and its glorious grunt hauls ass out of any mountain bend, no matter the incline. Most astonishing of all given it's the heaviest bike here, the Tracer is the most frugal on fuel too, returning a hugely impressive 62mpg on this trip.

> **'Reverberating around the valley like a wailing banshee'**

'If I was going to buy one of these, I reckon it'd be the Tracer,' chirps Gary after four days swapping between saddles. 'It's the most polished and complete of the three. Any edge it loses in the mountains – and it's not much at all – is more than made up for in distance comfort. In fact, the only thing that'd put me off is the lack of shaft drive.'

Maybe that's next year's update. You heard it here first…

Verdict

For all its flashy paint, impressive tech and up-for-it attitude once the motorways are done, BMW's F900XR is flawed. There are times and places where the BMW shines, and brightly – but not brightly enough to make up shortcomings. As Chris puts it, 'the XR is more of a weekend blaster than a sports tourer. It hasn't got the tank range or comfort to tackle big trips and in this company that makes it the weakest.' Despite an improved base spec for this year, the XR still requires an appointment with the extras catalogue before being able to stand toe-to-toe with its rivals, too. To get the spec we have on test, including the panniers and satnav, needs an extra £4198 on top of the £10,890 base price. And this means spending £734 more than for Yamaha's superior package.

Triumph's Tiger Sport 800 is good. Really good. It's nipping at the heels of the class' incumbents with value for money at the core of its proposition. It doesn't radiate the same class or sophistication as the BMW or Yamaha, but the important tech is there – and in terms of performance and handling it's the best of the trio. It's just a tad disappointing that the stock shock lets the side down, the cruise control is basic and the 'bars transmit a few vibes at motorway speeds. Oh, and the clocks are unreadable in bright sunlight. All are forgiveable given the Sport's attractive price, but when it comes down to it the Tiger is an oh-so-close second.

And so Yamaha's Tracer 9 GT remains the standout choice. At just over £14k, this latest GT is almost as stacked with tech as the GT+ but for a handsome wedge less, with the same dreamy engine and sumptuous semi-active suspension, and more gadgets than my 50-plus-year-old brain can realistically handle.

After almost 1400 miles, the last words come from Gary. 'For me, the Yamaha is the clear winner. Love the engine, superb comfort, great tech, and it works brilliantly at both long-haul and the fun stuff.' As an upright sporty tourist, you can't really ask any more than that.

'Stacked with tech, dreamy engine, and sumptuous semi-active suspension'

Fancy some of this? Take the Tracer 9 GT

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BRIDGESTONE
TRACER
GT
YAMAHA

SPECIFICATIONS	BMW F900XR	TRIUMPH TIGER SPORT 800	YAMAHA TRACER 9 GT
Contact	bmw-motorrad.co.uk	triumphmotorcycles.co.uk	yamaha-motor.eu/gb
Price (on the road)	from £10,890 (£13,540 as tested)	from £10,995 (£12,482 as tested)	£14,354
Capacity	895cc	798cc	890cc
Engine	8v DOHC parallel twin	12v DOHC inline triple	12v DOHC inline triple
Bore x stroke	86 x 77mm	78 x 55.7mm	78 x 62.1mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain
Power	103bhp @ 8500rpm (claimed)	113bhp @ 10,750rpm (claimed)	117bhp @ 10,000rpm (claimed)
Torque	69 lb.ft @ 6750rpm (claimed)	62 lb.ft @ 8500rpm (claimed)	69 lb.ft @ 7000rpm (claimed)
Top speed	125mph (estimated)	130mph (estimated)	135mph (estimated)
Frame	steel shell bridge	tubular steel perimeter	aluminium diamond
Front suspension	43mm usd forks, no adjustment	41mm usd forks, adjustable compression and rebound damping	41mm usd forks, adjustable preload and semi-active damping
Rear suspension	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound damping	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound damping	monoshock, adjustable preload and semi-active damping
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 320mm discs, four-piston calipers / 265mm disc, single-piston caliper	2 x 310mm discs, four-piston calipers / 255mm disc, single-piston caliper	2 x 298mm discs, four-piston calipers / 267mm disc, single-piston caliper
Tyres (f/r)	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17
Rake/trail	26°/105.2mm	23.8°/99mm	24°/106mm
Wheelbase	1523mm	1422mm	1500mm
Weight	216kg (wet, claimed)	214kg (wet, claimed)	231kg (wet, claimed)
Seat height	820mm	835mm	845/860mm
Tank size	15.5 litres	18.6 litres	19 litres
Economy	57mpg, 195-mile range	58mpg, 230-mile range	62mpg, 259-mile range
Electronics	ABS, traction control, three riding modes, connectivity, heated grips, quickshifter. Options: Pro riding modes, Dynamic ESA suspension, cruise control, keyless ignition, Intelligent Emergency Call	ABS, traction control, three riding modes, quickshifter, cruise control, connectivity. Options: LED indicators, auxiliary power socket, heated grips, tyre pressure monitors	ABS, traction control, five riding modes (two custom), brake hill hold, quickshifter, connectivity, cruise control, semi-active suspension, electrically operated screen, heated grips, keyless ignition, electrically locked luggage
***Bike* rating**	7/10	9/10	9.5/10

‘There is something intoxicating about motorbikes’

Formula 1 car world champion **Damon Hill** wanted to be a motorcycle racer, not a car racer. This is his story

By **Mat Oxley** Photography **Hill archive, Goodwood, Phil Masters, Mike Hayward, Bauer**

Damon Hill and his dad Graham won three Formula 1 car world championships between them – in 1962, 1968 and 1996 – yet their first loves were motorcycles.

Hill senior was a motocrosser – a scrambler, in 1950s jargon – until he had a nasty crash on a road bike, which eventually led to him racing F1 cars with Lotus, BRM and Brabham, among others. Hill junior won club racing championships aboard a Yamaha TZ350 until he ran out of money and moved into cars. ‘Dad’s first sport was motocross, but he badly broke a leg in a road accident, after which he always walked with a limp,’ says Damon.

Damon knows he inherited his love for motorcycles from his dad, but he has always wondered from where his dad’s infatuation came. He thinks it may have something to do with epigenetics – traits that are passed from parents to children not via DNA but through life experiences.

‘My dad’s dad never drove cars or rode bikes, but his mum rode bikes. I’ve got a great photo of her between the wars, on a bike, wearing jodhpurs and gauntlets. We now know that the experiences of the mother can alter the make-up of the child – and mum was pregnant with dad when she was riding around on a motorbike.’

Damon Hill on his Yamaha TZ350 at Brands Hatch, 1983. This is what style looks like

agv
DAMON HILL
NGK
Brands Hatch Racing
69

The Oxley interview

Mat is a TT winner, endurance racer, author and MotoGP paddock insider

Kawasaki
J.H.MOORE
WATFORD.
158

Squeezing every last drop out of his poor Z500

Hill spent much of his childhood at racetracks, watching his dad race to the very pinnacle of car racing, but he had no real interest in engines and wheels until fate intervened when he was 11 years old.

'I was at Silverstone, hanging around while my dad was racing, bored out my mind,' he says. 'These friends were in the paddock mucking about on a monkey bike. They said: "Do you want a go? You just sit there and turn that." I rode off and it was like, bing! My head just went boom and I couldn't stop thinking about it. After that I just wanted a motorbike.'

Hill's first motorcycle was a Bultaco Alpina 350 trials bike. 'We had a bit of land, so I used to blat around on that. Dad had a Norton Commando and he used to take me for rides through the lanes. I remember clinging on to the back of him, the trees going past, all those powerful experiences you get when you ride a bike, which you don't really get anywhere else.'

And then in 1975 Hill's life changed forever. His father was killed in a light-plane crash.

'I'd just turned 15. It's like your head being cut off,' he says. 'I was lost and my mum was lost. We just had to plough on. But there was a little part of my brain, going, "poor mum, but I'm still young and I want to get out there". I had the bug in me and my ambition was to race bikes.'

First came mopeds and road bikes. And punk rock. 'I used to ride my Puch moped from where we lived in Hertfordshire to the Marquee [legendary former gig venue in Soho, London] to see the Sex Pistols, Generation X, The Clash and people like that. I'd be sweating buckets, then I'd ride home, middle of winter, freezing cold, slipstreaming diesel trucks, trying to keep warm.'

Punk was a big thing for Hill – he formed a band with some mates: The Hormones.

Finally, motorcycles won the battle for his soul. 'My first proper bike was a Honda CB360. Horrible thing, so I got rid of that and bought a CB500 four.'

And, as you did in those days, Hill started racing on his CB500 road bike.

'I rode down to Brands Hatch on the 500 to do the racing school,' he says. 'I'd never been on a racetrack on a bike before – you're riding around going, er… so much space! Then I put some numbers on the 500 and raced at Lydden Hill, with my orange novice jacket. I had some fun doing that and the next level was entering the Kawasaki 500 series.'

Kawasaki's Z500 championship was a one-make road-bike championship that was created to help youngsters shine without bankrupting themselves.

'Oh my God, I was so stupid!' says Hill. 'I'd work all week [despatch riding and labouring on building sites] and do no work on the bike until Friday night. You'd prepare the bike, leave home in your rented van at ten in the evening, get to Cadwell at one in the morning, no sleep, stinking of petrol, asphyxiating yourself.

'I was totally green and naïve but I loved it, I had a great time, because it was an adventure. Everything was an adventure, because when you're that age it's all chaos – you just throw yourself at things.'

Then the next steps up the ladder, from pimped-up road bikes to a TZ350 GP bike. And a fascinating insight into a young racer's psyche – especially that of the winner of motorsport's biggest prize, the F1 championship.

'I wasn't winning anything. If I'm completely honest I never really understood that the whole point was to be at the front. I never really got that, I was just going racing!' says Hill, laughing at himself. 'I wanted to do well but… Anyway, eventually I got a chance. Some friends of my dad's took pity on me and sponsored me. I thought I was going okay, then I rode in some internationals and I was way out of my depth. I couldn't even get the bike off the grid!'

This was the age of dead-engine push starts, when those old two-stroke machines were oh-so-tricky to ride, but only if you could manage the not-inconsiderable feat of bumping your engine into life.

'I'd be left on the grid, pushing, every time, until the sponsors gave up on me.'

After that, Hill went money hunting.

'I did a pitch to the Midland Bank. I went and bought a pinstripe suit. I wasn't good at it, I wasn't a sales guy, it was so fucking embarrassing. I went in there with my portfolio. The guy was very nice to me but he obviously thought, this poor sod hasn't got a clue!'

Hill refused to use his name to open doors, so the only way forward was to dedicate every waking moment, when he wasn't racing, to despatch riding. Pre-internet and emails, despatching was a good way to earn serious cash.

Hill in his motorcar, taking yet another flag

‘My head just went boom. After that I wanted a motorbike’

GOODYEAR
BULTACO
BULTACO
SIDI
SIDI

Graham and Damon, cool Bultaco Alpina, even cooler Sidis

'I decommissioned my Z500 from racing. When I started using the bike for despatching, it still had clip-ons, rearsets, high-lift cams, a race pipe and stuff. It was a beautiful bike – I could do wheelies up to fifth gear.

'I rode all day, every day, in all weathers. I was making £250 a week [a grand now], cash in my back pocket, so I bought another TZ350 off a friend and I bought a van – a big step forward – and a set of Lectron carbs. [Lectrons were popularised by 'King' Kenny Roberts.]

'Then I had an epiphany. At some point in racing, you're either going to give up or something happens that makes you want to go on.

'The Lectrons were life-changing – one bump and you were away. About the only time I'd got a good start before that was at an Oulton Park British championship meeting. I flew off the grid like a maniac. I was second, thinking, I'm second, in a national race, what the fuck am I doing? So they all came past.

'So, I learned from that. First time with the Lectrons was at Brands and I was first away. This time I wasn't looking behind – every lap is the first lap, keep going like that until I see the flag. And I won the race. Oh my God, I'd cracked it! That day I won every single race.'

Hill's speed won him a ride in the legendary Yamaha RD350LC Pro-Am series in 1982 and the King of Brands title in 1984, but success came too late. He had the cash to race the TZ here and there in Britain but that was about it. Meanwhile, his mum Betty wanted to get him off bikes and into his dad's business, where his name opened doors whether he liked it or not.

'Car racing is a whole different world,' he says. 'The people involved are running businesses. They're not dealers selling bikes or anything, they are running a racing business. Some rich guy gives them a pile money to run him in racing and they use some of that money to find a talent.'

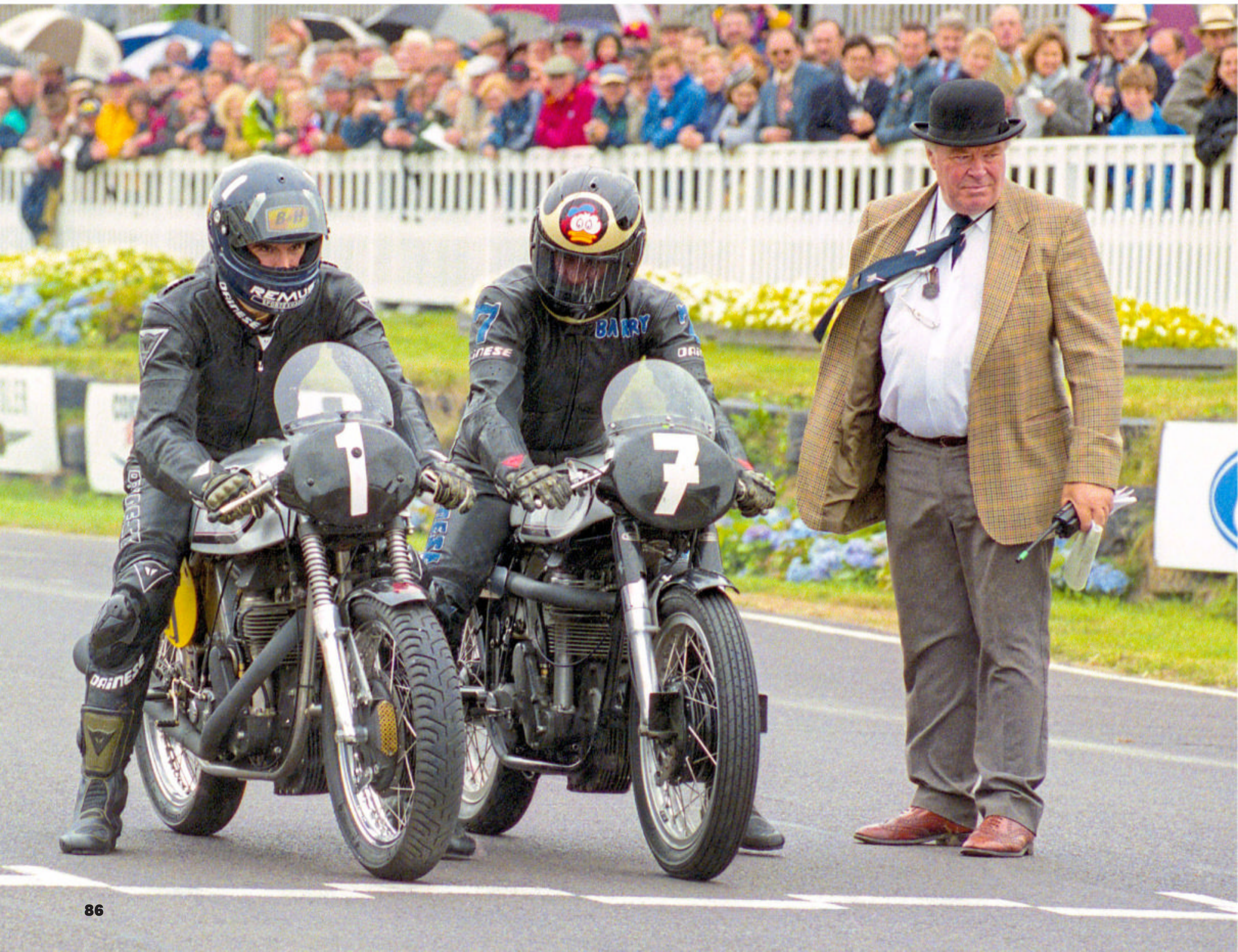
That's how car racing works: drivers climb the business ladder, from small businesses running cars in British championships to small corporations turning over hundreds of millions in F1.

In 1984 Hill raced bikes and cars, prompting Brands Hatch's chief executive John Webb to sponsor him: bikes at Brands on Saturday, cars on Sunday. Webb was a character from a different age, a kind of Arthur Daley of the racetracks.

'Once I turned up at Brands and the TZ seized its crank in practice,' Hill remembers, 'so I told John I couldn't race. He said: "What do you mean you can't race?!" Then he said to the woman behind the bar, because he was always in the bar, "Here, Doris, get two hundred quid out of the till." And he said to me, "Go and find a bike for the day – and I'll find out how much you spent, so don't try to cheat me." I found a bike and won the race.

'Until then I'd been thinking, there's something amazing about my bike, because I'm winning all the time. So that was another of those moments – my bike wasn't why I was winning races.'

And yet Hill still doesn't rate himself as a two-wheel talent. 'I was okay,' he shrugs.



Hill with his hero Barry Sheene, Goodwood, 1999

‘All those powerful experiences you get when you ride a bike, you don’t really get anywhere else’

Back to his dirt roots, off-roading with some mates

Route de la Bonette
23 La plus haute d'Europe
Alt. : 2802 m
143 NICE

Touring on a Bonnie in France. Nice indeed

Not surprisingly, cars felt very alien.

‘The first thing I felt was massive claustrophobia,’ he says. ‘The second thing is that they had no power. It wasn’t until I got into F3000 [the final bit of the road into F1 at the time] that I had some power and I could do something with that power, so it became more like bikes.

‘But you’re strapped in, so there’s nothing you can do with your body. I had bruises on my knees because I was always poking my knees out going round corners. In cars you’ve got g-loads, which push you to the outside, so it’s all very counter-intuitive compared to bikes.’

Bruised knees? No worries. Hill was on his way to the top, with no more worries about affording new pistons for his TZ. In 1991 he joined the dominant Williams F1 team as test driver, and five years later he was F1 world champion. He retired at the end of 1999.

Since then he’s done a bit of everything, most noticeably as an expert witness in Sky’s F1 coverage. But when he talks about F1 and bikes it’s pretty obvious where his heart really lies. So, would he have preferred to have been a MotoGP world champion?

‘I would’ve been very happy to be a MotoGP champion but I’m also happy I don’t have too many broken bones,’ he grins.

‘There’s something intoxicating about motorbikes. The other thing is their aesthetic appeal. Nearly all bikes are things of beauty, which you don’t instantly have with cars.’

Hill still indulges his love of motorcycles by riding on the road and doing off-road weekends with mates. He has also visited the Isle of Man’s Classic TT a couple of times and many years ago contested the Goodwood Revival motorcycle race, sometimes partnering childhood hero Barry Sheene, other times racing against him.

‘Barry said: “You’ve got to do the bike race at Goodwood!” I didn’t want to do it but eventually, I said okay. He was doing F1 commentary, so he used to try to suck information out of me. I was in England, and he was in Australia, so he’d phone me at six in the morning. “Hello mate, it’s me!” “Barry, it’s fucking six o’clock, why are you calling me?”’

Hill’s humility is such that he still can’t believe his childhood heroes would even want to talk to him. Another time he found himself chatting with another childhood hero – three-times MotoGP champ Roberts, Sheene’s nemesis. ‘I was thinking, I can’t believe this!’

Hill will soon be back on TV, in a Sky documentary telling the story of his and his dad’s racing careers, titled *Hill*.

NEXT ISSUE Mat talks to everyone’s fave MotoGP bloke **Jack Miller** about his switch to Yamaha

It's just too cheap… isn't it?

The new **Morbidelli T1002V** adventure bike comes with all the bells and most of the whistles for a pinch under eight grand. Surely there's a catch…

By **Justin Hayzelden**

Designed in Italy, built in China, reborn Morbidelli's first attempt at a big adventure bike cuts quite a dash. From a distance it looks the part – no sense of being a clone or bitsa – and when you get up close it continues to look the business. There's nothing that suggests cost-saving measures that allow the standout price tag. On first impressions it's hard to know quite how they can design, develop, build, distribute and sell the new T1002V for just £7999 (yes, okay, plus £200 on-the-road costs).

For those going 'Morbiwho?', the brand was famous back in the '70s, notching up multiple wins and world championships in 125 and 250cc GP racing. Besides their bizarre (but cool) V8 prototype produced in the '90s, it's not a name particularly associated with road bikes, but the acquisition by MBP (a firm under the Keeway umbrella) in 2024 is changing this. First, we got the C1002V cruiser (tested last issue), and now its adventuring stablemate has arrived. There's an up-spec T1002VX as well, with brighter stickers and spoked wheels for an additional 200 quid.

Fancy-spec 997cc V-twin, same price as a basic Versys 650. Blimey

PICS: GARY CHAPMAN

Does its V-twin pack a punch?

Not really, but it does have enough of a jab to make you smile. The 66 lb.ft, 89bhp, 997cc 80° V-twin engine is lifted directly from the C1002V and has an easy-going attitude that responds best to short-shifting. Peak torque is at 5250rpm and delivers third-gear happiness on tangled B-roads, and in top gear it steadily swallows motorway miles all day long. It's also remarkably vibe-free and makes an entertaining hubbub through the intake when you get on the gas. There's no quickshifter for snicking rapidly between cogs, but a quick tap of the toe makes it relatively effortless all the same. Pity about the 3000-mile service interval, though – seems rather restrictive for a motor that's unstressed and likely to see touring miles.

Surely they've skimped on the running gear?

Well, no. The T1002VX has fully adjustable KYB suspension front and rear, and it's perfectly capable of keeping the bike's (albeit relatively mild) manners under control. An all-up mass of 265kg means its no lightweight, but it carries this bulk well, the chassis neutrally balanced and pleasantly composed when tracking through turns. Brakes are J.Juan calipers with 320mm discs, monitored by Bosch Cornering ABS Pro in case of heavy-handed silliness or super-slippery surfaces. Or both. It wears Pirelli Scorpion Trail STR rubber too, rather than an unknown brand as you might expect, giving the Morbidelli a confident footprint.

Will it trump the DS900X?

The T1002V undercuts the also-made-in-China rival from Voge by a grand, but that's largely accounted for by luggage (the fully lined, quick-release metal boxes are £499 extra on the Morbi') and some electronics – it hasn't got a dashcam or radar blind spot gubbins. But would you miss them if you've never had them? The Morbidelli nudges ahead with a feeling of completeness, and its nicely rumbling V-twin engine has a smoother and more laid-back nature than Voge's parallel unit.

This is not the bleeding edge of adventure bike design. At £8k, who cares?

Will it quench my thirst for tech?

Surprisingly at this price, yes. There are four riding modes (Standard, Sport, Rainy Days and Off-road) – switching between them involves the inconvenience of having to stop, but there are distinct differences between them. It's got cruise control, tyre pressure monitoring, power sockets, plus heated grips *and* seat. A neat 7in TFT display unloads all the info you could want, plus the T1002V has Morbidelli Connect so you can tether your device over the 4G network; it gives tracking with motion sensitivity, journey stats and performance-related figures, as well as an opportunity to hook up with other owners to share favourite roads.

You're not that likely to bump into many other owners just yet, mind. But given the stress-free ride, decent spec and impressive feel of togetherness, there's every chance that's likely to change. *Bike*

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £8199 otr **Engine** 997cc SOHC 80° V-twin **Power** 89bhp **Torque** 66 lb.ft **Top speed** 120mph (est) **Rake/trail** n/a **Wheelbase** 1581mm **Kerb weight** 265kg **Tank size** 20 litres **Economy** 50mpg (tested) **Seat height** 820mm **Colours** white, black **Availability** lined up ready

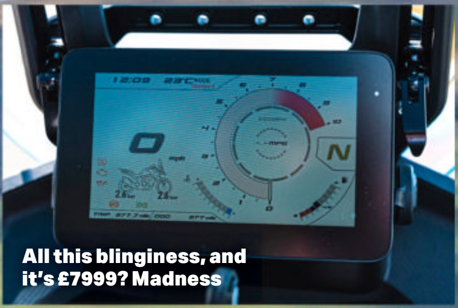
***Bike* verdict**

Imagine a bike in the nature of a Suzuki V-Strom 1050, but with more tech and a price tag that's £5500 lower. Reliability and longevity (and residual value) are unknowns, yes – but the T1002V is under-stressed and parent firm Keeway know what they're doing. Decent, this.

***Bike* rating 8/10**

Made by KYB, fully tweakable, not from the 'budget' bucket

Not the most exciting motor. But that doesn't mean duff



All this blinginess, and it's £7999? Madness

> 'The twin makes an entertaining hubbub through the intake when you get on the gas'

Think of anywhere better for a weekday afternoon?

How to be an adventure riding superhero

…or at least how to feel like one and not fall into every hedge. We go for a trail-skills masterclass in the sun-drenched Peaks

By **Mike Armitage** Photography **Chippy Wood**

Much steeper and narrower than it looks. No, honestly...

Despite much brain racking, chin rubbing and gazing thoughtfully into the distance, I can't think of any bike-related carry-on that I'd rather be doing at this moment. I'm on a trail somewhere in the Peak District with mate and occasional *Bike* contributor Dom Mattock. We're mere dots on a rolling, jutting and endless landscape that stretches to shimmering distance horizons. Soul-warming sun radiates from an expansive sky and ahead is a byway open to all traffic (BOAT), encouraging us to deploy our Fantic XEF 250s.

And the best bit is that neither of us has endured an unplanned interface with the ground or verdant greenery. These surroundings aren't where we'd normally ride a motorcycle, but last year Dom and I did a level one beginner trail riding course with Phoenix Motorcycle Training in the West Pennines that revealed a whole side to two wheels – and, crucially, brought new-found ability and confidence. It gave the foundation skills to be able to toddle off down a track on an adventure bike without being a pale bag of nerves. So now we've come to the more up-and-downy Peak District for a day doing level two, hoping to be turned into Dakar-ready heroes – or at least to be able to cope with ruftier, tuftier terrain and unlock even more destinations.

Skill one: ride the ground subconsciously

Our instructor is John Bilborough again, Phoenix's vastly experienced trail tutor who delivers instruction and guidance with a calm, laid-back manner. After a brush-up on the basics learned last time over breakfast – body position is key, look well ahead, elbows up and heels down, be smooth and delicate with the controls – we headed to a simple track to get a feel again, before hitting the hills and the proper stuff.

My cockiness vanishes as we saunter up a dappled farm track, turn left, and are faced with what appears to be a scrabbling narrow footpath littered with wheel-bothering limestone boulders. Dom and I stop, gawp at each other, then look round for John like a pair of lost toddlers.

Mike spots the rare Pied Flycatcher and turns for the hedgerow

'With ascents and rocks, it's all about line choice – picking the smoothest, cleanest route – and looking well ahead,' says John over the oh-so-useful intercom. 'Your instinct is to look at the rocks, but look beyond them – I'm scanning from perhaps ten metres ahead to the far distance and back again, depending on visibility due to trees and bushes. You ride the ground in front of you subconsciously, because if you've looked ahead, you already know what's coming and have picked the best line. The bike will generally do the work for riding over anything.'

Bounding up a steep, confined trail takes a little acclimatising. Talking myself through it helps – relax, believe in the bike's capabilities, stop holding your breath – and so does having John following behind, gently giving guidance into my earpiece. We tackle the climb a couple of times, until the ignore-the-obstacles technique starts to feel natural. John has another tip, too. 'When it's been dry for a couple of weeks, like today, you've

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> ‘If you lose your mojo just slow down, sit and paddle – doesn’t look as cool, but you’ll catch the bike’

Rocking and rolling along. It’s all about line planning

Enjoy every mile

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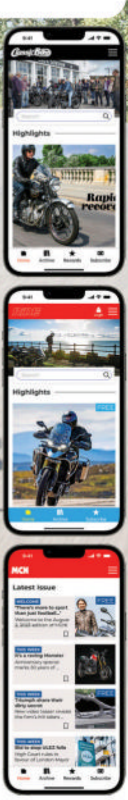

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got a lot of loose surface and dust, so try to be a gear higher than you would be normally. It makes the throttle less responsive when you're stood up, so any body movements have less unplanned input. The Fantic's single-cylinder engine is quite torquey and will pull you up.'

This calmer approach works a treat. Progress is smoother, easier and faster – it seems a bit of pace is our friend (I try to block out the Jeremy Clarkson voice in my head shouting, 'Speed! Power! Yes!'). And the far-reaching vista from the peak at the top of the climb is fabulous.

Skill two: imagine you're being filmed

Imagine turning off a tight one-way city street directly onto a motorway. That's what the terrain change is like as we pootle across the hill tops. Well, kinda. Rocks and steepness are replaced with smooth hard-packed dirt, with tight banked-up corners leading us into a section of imposing whoops the like of which I haven't seen since hooning around Shepshed BMX track as a nipper on my Raleigh Grifter.

Despite the motocross-esque berms, the turns are dealt with just like regular flat corners: shuffle your bum to the outside, elbows up, push the bike down into the corner, keep your head up and look through the turn. 'Berms are nice because they mean the bike won't wash out,' reckons John. 'Ride them halfway up and let the berm support the bike. Slow in, then a smooth and slightly positive throttle through and out.'

The thing that perhaps astounds me the most when riding away from tarmac is how much grip there is when using proper knobbly rubber. The amount of throttle and front brake you can use before the tyre gives up is remarkable (especially the braking). With the positive camber from the berm, I can now feel this grip while cornering, too. It takes a bit of building into, but once you understand that the bike's got your back it's like a big light has been switched on. I'm soon scooting around foot-out like a motocross star.

Pushing a limb out feels right. Obviously, it's wrong. 'If you're foot's going out, you need to be forward on the seat and your foot high and forward, heel down,' says John. 'You don't want a chance of your foot catching and turning your leg. It's always safer to keep feet on the pegs. Racing enduro or motocross is a different kettle of fish – when you're trail riding, you don't want to risk unnecessary injuries. They don't take any looking for.'

No need for flash-looking body contortions as we head to the whoops either. My instinct is to thrust my bumcakes back going into the dip and lean forward going out, which, predictably, isn't the best way. You do need to use your body, though. 'Let your body absorb the whoops from a neutral, central position, with your heels down and pushing through the bike,' confirms John. 'It's about being smooth, steady, having constant throttle, and using your body as part of the suspension – imagine someone is filming and your body stays in one

Don't know what whoops are? These are whoops. Whoopy...

'And that bit is softest if you need a quick lie down'

'Whoops like I haven't seen since hooning on a BMX track on my Raleigh Grifter'

Dom fighting urge to stick a hoof out for the camera

In his head this looks like Freestyle Motocross

position, squatting through it with the bike moving up and down beneath you.'

This technique comes by ensuring I'm doing the relaxed thing I've had to be frequently reminded about all day (having the instructor in your ear via intercom is worth its weight in bent levers). Unknown surfaces and unusual obstacles cause me to drop my gaze and tense up, but successful whooping comes from being fluid and letting the bike ride the terrain. Like so much with trail and adventure riding, when you get it right you feel it. The 250s smoothly absorb the ups and downs, both wheels in contact all the time. 'Too fast and the bike will start rebounding, feeling like it wants you to push you off,' notes John, as Dom starts to get carried away and ricochets across the tops. 'The Fantics are quite stiff, but these whoops will quite easily overcome the bike's suspension, especially on softer dual-purpose bikes like a Honda CRF300.'

Skill three: suffer the consequences

We sweep along the edge of fields, slip through farmyards and potter through villages. The ever-changing terrain and increased skill requirements of the level two course are a lot to take in, but with every mile (and every subtle vocal nudge from John) it becomes more natural and instinctive. This is fabulously engaging and rewarding.

Then we reach a rock-strewn descent with drop-offs, and my bum gets a bit twitchy again. Romping up hills under power is well and good, and I'll deal with corners and splashes all day long. But steep downhill sections still make me nervous – especially with sudden changes in height.

Everything we've learned so far – head up, relax, pick a route, ignore what's directly in front of you – still applies here, but I need to resist the temptation to shove my weight back. Staying central on the bike helps both feel and control, and it means there's some weight transfer to the front when braking. It's another lesson in understanding what the bikes can do and taking the rewards that a little confidence and self-belief bring. And both are handy when dealing with the two drop-offs halfway down the descent.

'Don't brake at the top of them or your front wheel drops straight down,' warns John. 'Instead, have a slightly slow approach, then give the bike a bit of gas. Stand, chin up, fairly neutral position; if you push the bike ahead of you and lean back, when you land anything can make you lose the front. Give a little squirt of gas to keep the bike level as you go over.'

If you really must wave a hoof, do it like this, look

It feels brilliant. The drops are maybe only a foot or two, the tyres out of contact for a split second, but letting the 250s dance cleanly off the edge – and doing it safely, with control – is a great sensation. So is bounding back up and really putting our ascent skills to the test.

Picking a route across the trails and sticking to it has worked all day, and it's the way forward as we reach a rutted section. Dom's impulse is to stick to the centre of the track, but John's experience tells otherwise: 'Look up the rut you're in, into the distance. Don't get fixated on what's eight or ten feet ahead. Once I've committed to a rut, I normally suffer the consequences – it's tempting to try to swap if something looks disconcerting, but often the edges of the rut will catch your tyre and throw you off. Lots of people go for the centre rut, but if they get into a pickle then they have nowhere to put their feet. You're sometimes better to commit to the wider side rut, so if you need to stop there's banking that makes it easier to get feet down.'

Today's ride comes after weeks of unseasonal sunshine and the ground is packed pretty solid, but it's easy to imagine slop, deep water and slippery grass. 'I'm a stand-up rut guy,' continues John, 'but if you have a moment or lose your mojo just slow

‘With every mile it becomes more natural and instinctive. This is fabulously rewarding’

Stand, sit, no matter – it’s all about what works for you

down, sit, get your feet out and paddle. Doesn’t look as cool, but you’ll always catch the bike.’

Quite how much we’ve come on during the day is highlighted with the final section of the afternoon. A modest-looking track glides across the glorious open Peaks landscape, before disappearing through dense hedges and plummeting down a hillside festooned with huge, grip-free limestone rocks. It’s the sort of route that would usually fall under Phoenix’s level three banner and normally make me turn around and find a different way. But down we go… and then back up again, through this amazing scenery, just for the hell of it.

What a glorious feeling. **Bike**

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‘So leaning forward helps with trapped wind?’

It's a lane, and it's definitely green

Green lane greatness?

If you're inspired by our antics on the previous pages then Suzuki's new **DR-Z4S** could be right up your byway. It might be the perfect road-legal trailie…

By **Chris Newbigging**

This make anyone else think TLC?

Spot a swarm of green-laners on a weekend and there'll be an old DR or DRZ in there. However, we've been without a proper Suzuki dual-purpose trailie since Euro2+ emission regulations halted the DRZ400S in 2009. It stayed on sale in the US and remained Suzuki USA's biggest seller until last year, though, and has now had a big overhaul. Yes, it's primarily for the States – but we're getting the new DR-Z4S here in the UK, too. And for those of us looking to make trail riding our midlife crisis, this is Very Good News.

The current trail options are basic novice-friendly bikes like the Honda CRF300L, which isn't powerful or well-suspended enough for anything more than very gentle green-laning; or a ferocious full-on enduro iron with piston life measured in hours.

Significantly re-engineered and now boasting ride-by-wire, traction control and ABS, the DR-Z4S could be the trailie the UK needs… although the projected price of around £8000 initially feels like a lot for a 'simple' thumper.

Does it need more poke?

Suzuki say not, defending the almost-identical 37bhp peak figure from the heavily reworked version of the 398cc single-cylinder motor. Most of its revision reduces noise, losses and inefficiency; essentially, they've had to strangle it into emission compliance, then work back up to where they started. Their reasoning is that the old 400 was just right for typical buyers, and making it more lairy would be counterproductive.

I'm inclined to agree. As a recreational trail rider my dirt skills are somewhere between flailing novice and mildly competent, and the DR-Z suits me far better than an enduro bike. There's enough torque off the bottom to climb, hoof out of turns, and pop the front up over obstacles using the throttle. It's far from lacking for non-competitive frolics, and the extra flywheel effect makes it more tolerant of low revs than something 'Ready to Race'…

It has enough frisk to entertain, without getting you into bother. Kind of just right, really.

Above, left: single-pot motor doing what it was invented for

Above, right: modes more useful than you'd think

'Doesn't underwhelm ex-MX nuts who say 'gnarly' and 'rad''

Electronics? Off-road?

Yes. But my initial scepticism is edged out by understanding and acceptance. Not for the ABS: press and hold the button twice to knock it on the head for any dirty escapades. But the riding modes (A-C, like road-only Suzukis) are more relevant than I imagined with such a modest output. 'A' gives the most immediate clout and works fine until things get tight and technical, when it's a bit too nervy for stood-up twistgrip control – so you can tame it by popping into 'B' with its middling torque delivery. 'C' makes it feel rather like it has a bunged-up carburettor, though.

There's two traction control settings for road use, plus a Gravel mode that allows the rear the freedom it needs to spin a little faster than the front in slop, over roots and through mud. It prevents wild rpm spikes that can slew the rear and cause a twitchy bottom. Turning it off fully shows that, perhaps unexpectedly, having it turned on isn't a hindrance.

If you're new to the trails, the TC helps get a feel for what the Suzuki's well-suspended, grip-finding chassis can cope with, at reduced risk of ending upside-down in a dyke.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £8000 (est) **Engine** 398cc DOHC single **Power** 37bhp **Torque** 27 lb.ft **Top speed** 90mph (est) **Rake/trail** 27.5°/109mm **Wheelbase** 1495mm **Kerb weight** 151kg **Tank size** 8.7 litres **Economy** 80mpg (claimed) **Seat height** 920mm **Colours** yellow or grey **Availability** September '25

Bike verdict

It ticks the boxes for keen amateur trail riders that a CRF or competition bikes don't – and small adventure bikes, for that matter. It'll either revive true trail thumpers… or demonstrate why they disappeared.

Bike rating 8/10

Yes… but £2k more than a CRF300L?

Worth it. The Japanese-built DR-Z is neater than Honda's Thai-made CRF, with a sense it'll be more resistant to years of trail (ab)use. Its components are all most of us will need: the DR-Z's chassis flatters and cossets in gentle use, yet doesn't underwhelm the ex-MX nuts in the riding group on its launch who use words like 'gnarly' and 'rad' entirely unironically. It's balanced, stable and easy, but agile, finds traction, and ekes the fun out of woodland blats. Hard to ask for more.

No arguing with the proven CRF's huge value for absolute trail novices at £5899. However, if Suzuki confirm the £8000-ish price we strongly believe it will come in at, that feels right on the money for what the DR-Z4S is offering.

Enough visual 'grr' to go with the name? Yes

STREETFIGHTING YEARS

Ducati’s new **Streetfighter V2 S** has a smaller engine with less power and torque, but also less weight and a lower price than its predecessor. Does this make it the ideal Ducati road bike? Simon H finds out by racking up 250 Sunday miles

By **Simon Hargreaves** Photography **Jason Critchell**

Hot Bolognese sauce, what manner of ungainly contrariness is this? The cold-blooded red Ducati lumbers, kicks, chunters and confounds in equal measure as we thonk our first tentative yards across corrugated town streets chiselled into a Desperate Dan jawline of stubbly bumps.

The Streetfighter’s bars are spread so wide it’s like steering a floorboard. The thin, hard seat tests the measure of my inside leg – and I’m a six-footer; I’ve ridden ’crossers with less lank. But few with less weight – the Ducati doesn’t connect with the road so much as stutter an inch above it. And the suspension might say Öhlins, but it’s surely named after the Norse god of granite…

Don't be fooled by the smaller motor. It's perky – and eggs you on

The words of editor Mike ring in my ears between the V-twin's combustion strokes: 'Everyone says the new Streetfighter is a better, more civilised road bike than its predecessor…'. Really? Who is 'everyone', and why aren't they locked up? Mind you, I've ridden the previous Streetfighter V2, and that wasn't an armchair at a picnic, so maybe it's about perspective. Thus, with the spangly new Ducati safely garaged and ground anchored for the night, I plot a 250-mile route for our Sunday ride, make careful note of fuel availability to manage its dainty 15-litre tank, and hope it gets better from here – and, mostly, it definitely does.

Urban surfing

Sunday dawns with wall-to-wall sunshine, prolonging an unusually clement spring and putting everyone in a better mood. Right, let's reset and try the new Streetfighter V2 again. Plan is to dive into the Lincolnshire Wolds, arcing north to the Humber Bridge, then curl back south again making a long, 250-mile loop. I've ridden these roads for 30 years on a lot of different bikes, and still reckon the cocktail of bends, changes of topography and – in most places – quality of tarmac are among the best in the UK for digging into engine and chassis behaviour. Pretty scenery too, and an unhealthy selection of cafés to slake a rider's thirst and fill the aching void where a sausage bap should be, with a wealth of secluded stops to pause and reflect on the unadulterated joy of riding.

The Ducati throbs through Boston, levering between lines of toking builder's vans, its bar ends strategically placed at average family saloon wing mirror height (they're an inexplicable 30mm wider than previously). At low revs, as we trickle along fanning the clutch lever, I can distinctly feel the Streetfighter's array of engine management electronics beavering away to keep the motor from stalling or hesitating – engine revs rise and fall according to lever position, constantly chipping in to smooth out and help balance gearbox, throttle position and slipping plates. I appreciate Ducati's mission to civilise and harmonise their bikes, even the Streetfighty ones – remember when their Vs were aggravatingly clunky, with transmission backlash chattering the rider's teeth as much as thems on the rear sprocket? Those days are long gone; every Ducati generation gets smoother and less demanding, but hopefully without eroding the edginess that makes Ducati, Ducati – and nudging the Streetfighter around town is easy street (besides the unexpected weight of the clutch lever).

In the early chill, I also appreciate the motor's warmth flooding up when the fan kicks in – although imagine in central London in midsummer it'll still be too toasty. The 'Fighter may be all-new, but some things never change.

Less is more

Clearing out from the town's snarl, we hoof into countryside across the flatlands, past the Carrington Steam Rally – resist traction engine gag – which is where the Ducati's V-twin perks up. The 890cc V-twin supplants two of their motors: the 937cc Testastretta from the Multistrada V2 (and, logically, likely in the Monster, SuperSport, Hypermotard and DesertX), and replaces the 955cc Superquadro from the previous Streetfighter V2 and Panigale V2. It's a lot of ground to cover for one motor, but Ducati say the engine is 'only' 890cc because it puts a bit of performance space between it and the V4s.

Ducati's first Streetfighter was launched in 2009, with a barely apologetic 155bhp 1098cc engine – a mere 5bhp less than the sportsbike – and came across as the Monster's unreconstructed, forehead-dragging, bare-knuckle cousin. Wearing nowt but a perma-frown, it was like riding a fist fight. In contrast, the 132bhp 848-powered Streetfighter two years later was a delight – from the launch, in *Bike*, I wrote: 'The 848 is such an obviously ideal blend of performance and nudity even top-speed meatheads such as I can see the point. It's the smoothest, softest Ducati I've ridden.' Nevertheless, it wasn't a massive hit and canned in 2015.

But the Streetfighter idea wasn't, and in 2020 the Streetfighter V4 was born using an almost full-blown Panigale V4 engine – followed, two years later, by the 'milder' Streetfighter V2, with a paltry 150bhp 955cc Superquadro motor from the Panigale V2. Bearing in mind it had almost as much performance as the original big-bore Streetfighter, the old V2 was still a bit of a handful.

It's much better here than the old 'un, but the V2 still prefers open roads

Perfect for garage-based dreams of machine-gunning your neighbours

Single-sider? Meh. This new swinger is sculpted alloy loveliness

S gets Öhlins. Urge to stick fingers in is considerable

Ooh, look at this…

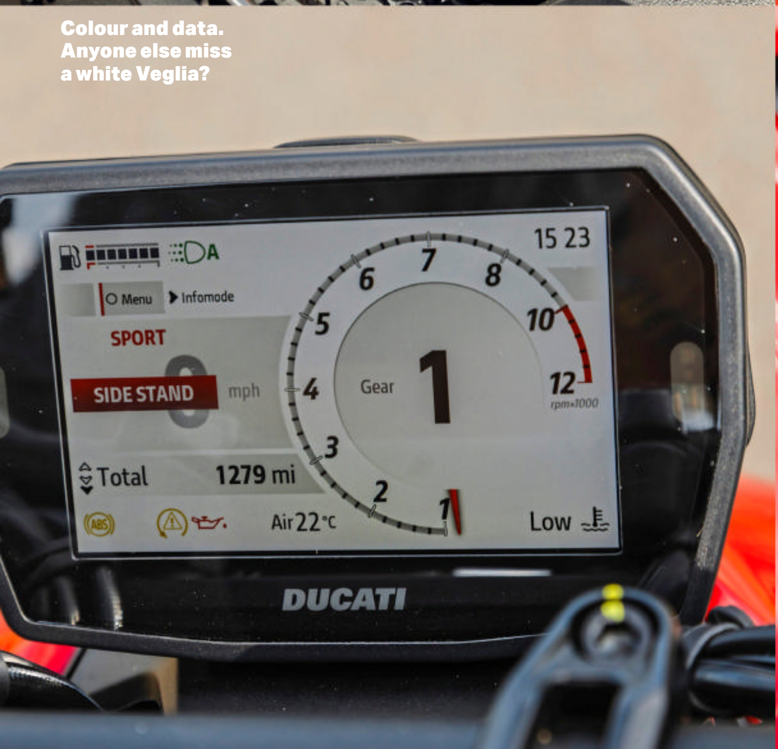
1 Exhaust cans are gorgeously groovy; no other manufacturer takes end cans as seriously as this. Even the welds look like someone cares.

2 Beautifully finished, sparse, organic, hollow cast aluminium swingarm is double-sided for the first time on a Streetfighter. It looks factory.

3 Öhlins shock looks like it's rising rate but it's actually cantilevered – a one-to-one ratio with the swingarm. But that alloy casting is pure horn.

4 Small TFT display isn't overloaded with info, but a six-axis IMU lends a deep dive of traction control, anti-wheelie and engine braking settings.

5 Single seat as standard has room for a fat wallet (unbelievably, pillion peg conversion is a £323.14 extra – what genius thought that up?).



Colour and data. Anyone else miss a white Veglia?

Be easier if it wasn't stuffed with so many fifties

18kg loss is noticeable on both back roads and joints

The new bike, as we start to climb into the Wolds towards Horncastle, is not. Its variable-valved 118bhp motor, liberated from desmodromic valve gear and the burden of unusable performance, is refreshingly light-hearted and revvy, balancing a surging bottom end with a potent-but-far-from-insignificant top end. It's a better and more satisfying match for British roads and, I suspect, riders too. A model losing nearly 30bhp over its predecessor ought to be headline news in a bad way – but we all know it doesn't matter when push comes to shove in a modern riding environment. These days, engine size is a matter of taste, not status.

With sap well and truly risen, the Streetfighter pings from apex to apex like a pinball wizard, and with joyful exuberance rather than an overcommitted grimace. And it's incredibly flexible – from 2000rpm to flat out, the most linear power delivery ever from a V-twin Ducati pours out a constant flow of drive. At one point, pulling away from a junction, it picks up from walking pace in fourth gear. It's like a twist-and-go – at 70mph in top the engine is pulling about 4800rpm; its on-cam sweet spot is a worryingly relaxed 90mph. It's a deceptively fast motor. So praise the lord for newly installed cruise control to prevent average speed camera transgressions (shamefully, although the bike comes fitted with the necessary switchgear, there's a £244.73 surcharge to activate it).

The new engine is also very vocal – the airbox induction warble has more than a hint of Tuvan throat singer about it; a mix of low-register bass and higher harmonics. It's not the booming Bologna soundtrack of old but addictive in its own way, and encourages opening the throttle as wide and often as possible. Be a shame not to heed the call.

Frisky business

A quick breather toddling through Horncastle, then we head for the jewel of the Wolds – Cadwell Park circuit, up the road the other side of Scamblesby. The Streetfighter bullets through the folds in the landscape, revelling in the grip from its Pirelli Rosso IVs. Last night, podging around for the first time on the bike, they felt remote and unyielding; today, with some heat in them, the tyres come to life and work with the Öhlins springs, not in spite of them.

There's a classic race car meeting on at Cadwell, so we avail ourselves of the canteen for a late breakfast and bone-up on the rest of the Streetfighter V2's changes. It's much as per the new Panigale V2 – an aluminium monocoque frame doubles as the airbox and is indeed mostly composed of air. Similarly, a sparse subframe is bolted onto the back of the rear cylinder head, and the hollow double-sided swingarm contorts itself between pivot and spindle like an athlete's ruptured cruciate ligament. With the bodywork off, it's hard to work out why the bike doesn't fold up and collapse on itself.

This is the £15,990 S model, which swaps the £13,990 standard bike's Marzocchi forks and Kayaba shock for the aforementioned Öhlins, and adds launch control and a pit lane limiter. There isn't a pit lane at Cadwell, let alone on the B1225, so we finish up, depart the circuit and ride back across the Wolds onto the Caistor High Road. The Streetfighter flits along rural lanes, frisking about with a new lightness of being. It only weighs a claimed 175kg – 18kg less than the previous V2 – and it feels flyweight. On the one hand it's hyper-agile and eager to turn (and easy to push around); on the other, not all mass is bad when you want to damp out bump forces. The Streetfighter demolishes smooth corners, but bumpy stuff has it over-reacting like a hammy actor. Okay, okay, calm down!

We stop for a gurgle of unleaded because the gauge is showing one bar left after 115 miles – consumption is low-40s mpg, but on 15 litres to empty that means filling up at around 120 miles. I sometimes wonder if half the reason manufacturers are obsessed with making fuel tanks smaller is because it's an easy way to shave a few kilos off the spec sheet.

Garage wood

Caistor dispatched, we bomb up a side road to get to the Humber Bridge and a date with lunch at the Viking Way Café Bar – a fab biker-friendly coffee stop and fooderie on the riverfront just under the bridge at Barton-upon-Humber. Basking in the sunshine, I take a moment to examine the Streetfighter up close. It looks horny and hand-made; the level of detailing and finishing is a work of design and materials art. The swingarm is extraordinary, but the overall effect is made by details like the section of steel brake pipe

Scampering away from Scamblesby and feeling very fine

SCRIVELSBY
GRANGE

They've got the stop-and-gawp-at-it bit nailed to perfection

from the rear caliper, the gorgeous shock mountings, and the exhaust plumbing that culminates in stubby twin cans with mesh baffles. It's exceptional; perfectly manicured and hard to believe it's mass-produced.

Dinner downed, we hitch our skirts and head back south, picking up the road to Market Rasen, flowing fast and free. By now we're slicing up the legendary bends back through Wragby and Bardney – you can't live in Lincs and not know them intimately. The Ducati eats it up, spunting from corner to corner in a welter of revs and flappery frolics. It's fun and fast, but I'm not convinced it's necessarily as fluid as I'd like. The motor hums and thrums contentedly – but after a few hours in the seat the I've decided the aggro riding position – bum up, knees almost touching, wide bars, forward-canted torso – is, like the rest of bike, an acquired taste. It aggravates my tendonitis and my right hand has gone numb – blame a life in the saddle if you wish, but an MT-09 and Street Triple don't have the same effect. It ain't natural human ergonomics.

Verdict

As the sun sets and we wend our way back home, the Streetfighter has me conflicted. I love its looks, design quality, ridiculous bespokery of components and finishing – if my bike life consisted of sitting in the garage admiring the machining, then riding to bike meets to have conversations about it, I'd take the Streetfighter all day. It makes an MT-09 look like an explosion in a parts factory. And the motor is the most flexible, forgiving Ducati Vee yet.

But as a cumulative riding experience – a bike to enjoy on the way to the meet, to bend a few back lanes, have a laugh, live it up a bit with an insouciant gallivant when plod are looking the other way – it still requires the rider to bend to it; literally. You have to meet the bike halfway; it's not an instant fit.

The Streetfighter V2 S may be another step on Ducati's path to civility, but it still makes demands of the rider to get there.

Makes light work of stuff like this. But you still need to put the effort in

> 'Another step on Ducati's path to civility, but still makes demands of the rider to get there'

Wading straight in

No adventure experience? Not even got a bike licence? No bother. Just buy a cheap old bike and set off to ride from Brisbane to London…

By **Ben Cichero**

It was early 2022, and my two friends and I were brainstorming holiday ideas after our Europe 2020 plans were cancelled due to Covid. Our 28th birthdays were just around the corner. 'Boys, I'm thinking this has to be a big one,' said my quintessential Australian mate, Jordan McNamee. 'How about one of those outback budget-rallies, the ones where you can only spend $1000?' suggested Tom Kimberley, attempting to please Jordan's aspirations. 'What if we rode motorbikes to London?'

The three of us had next to no motorcycle experience. Jordan didn't even have a licence. None of us were particularly in shape or had any expedition-based experience, yet it was decided in that moment that it was what we wanted to do.

Fast-forward to June 2023, where an office worker (me, Ben Cichero), events coordinator (Tom) and public servant (Jordan) all submitted their resignations, then enthusiastically began watching YouTube videos on how to ride around the world. We each bought a stock Suzuki DR650 on the advice that they're the Toyota Land Cruiser of the bike world. The weeks of preparation – uprated suspension, larger fuel tanks, bash plates, racks and panniers – leading up to our July departure were filled with 'what's this and where does it go?' and 'why is smoke coming from my wiring loom?'.

Disorganised and tragically behind schedule, we didn't even get chance to test our motorcycles with their recently added luggage. Our first stop was Noosa, a mere 90 minutes out of Brisbane, yet we were exhausted from the highway ride and already questioning each other over intercom on whether this was a good idea. Noosa is a beach town, and as Jordan went to exit the main shopping centre car park he lost

PICS: BEN CICHERO, JORDAN MCNAMEE, TOM KIMBERLEY

In at the deep end indeed

'An improvised zip-tied spanner as a makeshift clutch lever'

Clockwise from top left Posing with the hosts in Laos; enjoying soft sand; sunset in Indonesia; on the route less seen… and on a rare bit of tarmac. And who needs a paddock stand when you have luggage (right)?

his balance and the severely overweight DR slowly but surely dragged the 100kg, 6ft 2in man into the pavement. Land Rovers, Audis, Mercedes and BMWs all bore witness to the spectacle, traffic steadily building behind Jordan who was yet to work out how to pick his bike up. We were the definition of 'all the gear, no idea'.

Timor-Leste in Southeast Asia was a stark contrast to Australia, especially for Tom for whom this was his first time overseas. Infrastructure in the 22-year-old country is in its infancy, with electricity lines resembling old headphones tangled after being in your pocket for too long. At a local fish market I saw a family of five riding on one 50cc scooter – a baby was sandwiched between the mother and father, a toddler stood in the footwell, and the eldest child teetered on the edge of the back seat. I thought of my family back in Australia, and how I would consider five of us in our hatchback as a tight squeeze. No one here wore helmets or jackets; just sandals, T-shirts and shorts.

While somewhat daunting at first, diving head-first into a country such as Timor-Leste was probably a good thing. We learned some lessons straight away and travelled accordingly: do not trust Google Maps, carry provisions in case you get stuck, have an offline translator downloaded, do not drink tap water, set a meeting point in case we split up, pull off the road for a break before fatigue starts to set in, be cautious of meat sold on the roadside… the list could go on.

Riding between well-trodden tourist towns meant we were often travelling through rural outposts that were rarely – if ever – visited by outsiders. It was a special experience characterised by excitement and generous hospitality from the locals in each place we visited.

Tired and running well behind schedule on a hot Indonesian afternoon, we decided to make camp in a quiet field. As the sun set, we started to notice shapes moving through surrounding trees, which soon escalated into a small crowd inching in on our set-up. Having just crossed into the country, we had no internet access and began hand-signalling sleeping motions to understand if we were allowed to stay. Local children enveloped us, picked up our tents and ran away with them. We took chase, pushing our bikes with half-unpacked gear piled on the seats. Making our way through the foliage, we soon discovered our charades skills were out of practice and that our gesture of sleeping was misinterpreted for praying.

We prayed, greeted, sang and danced our way through the night, dreary eyed but extremely grateful for food provided by a village whose pride centrepiece was some corrugated iron held together by tree branches and string. We sat young, joyful children on our foreign motorcycles, letting them beep the horn and rev the engine. Everyone was having the time of their lives. The following morning we were given water from a dugout hole that used a tarp to prevent ground seepage and a massive plastic lid to prevent evaporation. This was a far cry from our treated, pressurised tap water. Unplanned interactions such as these became one of our favourite aspects of the trip, the experiences unique to visiting communities insulated from tourist-related development.

Reaching the northernmost point of our Southeast Asia loop, we found ourselves in the Vietnamese town of Hà Giang. This area is becoming synonymous with tourism for the scenic roads that connect the area's mountain towns. Deciding that joining a guided bike tour wasn't for us, we planned to follow a 40km single road from the Chinese border town of Giang Nam to Vinh Quang. One section of this route had several reviews stating it was impossible to pass even when it was dry, but the alternative was a staggering 150km detour. Against the advice of hostel staff, and with a two-to-one vote against a sick Tom, we set off on our shortcut.

We allocated six hours for what was indicated to be a two-hour ride and covered 30km in the first hour. We quickly decided this was one of the best decisions we had made all week. As the road began to climb and narrow into a mountain range we still felt competent, but then the bitumen changed to a cemented footpath, and not long after gave way to earth. Jordan haphazardly led the convoy, determined to complete the final stretch and settle in for a nice pho or bánh mì for lunch. 'This is not looking good,' relayed Tom from the middle of the pack. Vegetation became thick on either side of the path, which was regularly cut up by hazardous streams of water, turning our route into sludge. Second gear was soon completely out of the equation, the road resembling a hiking track cut into the side of a mountain. I was painted in mud from rear tyres. We decided to give our batteries and starters a rest, and to evaluate our situation.

Early afternoon and four hours into the ride, we ate emergency fruit that we had packed and cautiously sipped on our water bottles. 'If we turn around it's a long way to Vinh,' said Jordan. 'We could do that or push on for these next few kilometres and be at the town.' But we had no idea what lay ahead, and the mountain had no phone reception – something that didn't fill us with confidence. We had not seen another person since mid-morning.

Given we were already dirty and not far from our destination, we decided it was safest to push on… but then the route began to seriously degrade, all of us wondering how this was even categorised as a traversable route. The heavy Suzukis had no traction, forcing us to walk panniers uphill so we could scamper over mud and rock without the added weight. At 8pm I snapped my clutch lever. Obviously, we weren't carrying a spare. 'Now we are really f*cked,' said Tom,

still battling the remnants of a flu he had caught earlier that week.

Sharing the last of our food and water as night fell on the trail, we discussed at what point we would resort to the satellite phone. It was too far to walk to the nearest village off the mountain, yet our pace on the bikes was not much faster. Tired, dehydrated and hungry, the next morning we slogged on with an improvised zip-tied spanner as a makeshift clutch lever. This was the second time this particular spanner had saved us: the battery on Jordan's bike had died from the constant stalling, and it was used to directly bridge to another battery for a jump-start.

Morale hit an all-time low when the path that cut into a moss-covered rocky section collapsed under Jordan's bike. 'We are so finished,' said Jordan as he looked at his DR, now precariously dangling out over the steep Vietnamese mountain. With water running over the remains of the path, it was now far too dangerous to ride. We spent the best part of the next hour throwing all panniers to the other side, then using ropes and long sticks to slowly drag the still-hefty bikes to the other side. Oh, and for good measure Tom had burned his clutch out.

Bruised, battered and dirty-lipped from kissing the first road we'd seen in 36 hours, we eventually reached our destination town of Vinh at around 8pm. Dinner that night was the best meal of the entire trip.

May found us riding in Ladakh, a sparsely populated region of North India so blanketed in snow it looks other-worldly. The Himalayas – jutting from the earth and soaring into the sky – must be seen to be believed.

You would imagine this environment, with its low oxygen, encouraged caution on our part. You would be wrong. Confidently delivering a 'watch this' over intercom, Tom blasted past… and not 30 seconds later a plume of dust indicated that he was down. Tom's motorcycle had landed directly onto his foot. He winced as he held his leg close to his chest, bike tyres still spinning from the accident. There was nothing around for miles, we hadn't seen another soul that day, and there was no phone reception. Good friends that we are, we're the first to laugh at each other's misery. But it felt different this time.

Tom rode for the next five hours with a very sore foot, and we made it to a village where we were able to organise a truck to transport Tom and his bike to Leh the next day. As we watched a cast get fitted to his left leg, the doctor advised the situation didn't look great.

Then things just got silly. While Tom travelled with an elevated leg in the cab of the truck carrying his bike to Leh, it crashed into an oncoming car. As the other driver walked hands-on-head around his newly written-off vehicle, Tom's driver reversed, paused, and sped off into the distance – carrying Tom as prisoner to this accident. Jordan had to go off in pursuit…

Tom later flew home to Australia for surgery on his foot, including the installation of titanium implants. We met a fellow motorcycle tourer, Alex, who helped us transport Tom's bike from the snowy mountains to temporary storage in Amritsar. Jordan and I became great friends with Alex, consequently riding through most of the Middle East and into Europe together.

The scenery on the revered Pamir highway through Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan often had us wondering if we were still on earth. Sweeping expanses, snow, mud, sand, rock and grass continued and constantly changed for mile after mile, all without another being in sight. The travelling community in this area is everything you would expect and more; regardless of whether you travel by horse, bike, truck, car or pushbike, if you see someone in this region you stop, check in and often spend a night camping together. Everyone is enthusiastic and happy, which is unsurprising given the effort required to safely travel in this area.

Arriving in Europe was surreal. We no longer had people commenting 'you're riding where?'. Now they said, wide-eyed, 'you've ridden all the way from Australia?'. Tom had flown back to reunite with his bike after a short recovery in Australia and caught us in Greece. Creature comforts were everywhere: hard-paved roads, food, water, and unrestricted travel throughout the EU. While living out of a bag was exhausting, the thought of hanging up the gloves became bittersweet. We had ridden Australia, Southeast Asia, the Himalayas, the Middle East, the Balkans, and now motored through sights of Europe that we had only ever watched on screens. We really had biked to the other side of the planet.

Making our way through central London to Big Ben, we recalled significant moments: navigating monsoonal rain, hiking active volcanoes, being held at gunpoint by the Taliban, filling a tank for less than a dollar in Iran, making the Russian transit visa run in three days, the European Trans Euro Trail, and seeing the White Cliffs of Dover. We stumbled our way across the world, credit to a network of communities and strangers that helped us along the way. While our riding ability may not have improved drastically over the 70,000km we travelled, our willingness to ride head-on into whatever challenge came our way certainly bolstered. Changing an inner tube or completing an oil change felt like a leisurely activity compared to undertaking motorcycle repairs with no mechanics, no understanding of the local language and no internet tutorials to assist.

While we can offer little to no advice on how to return to a nine-to-five job at the conclusion of a trip like ours, we can confirm this: there is no better way to immerse yourself in what the world has on offer than on a motorcycle.

Clockwise from top left Ever-changing landscapes; ace ferry in Vietnam; Sarfaranga, just outside Skardu, the highest cold desert in the world; listening for the bong; and who built a wall across the road?

> ‘We stumbled our way across the world, credit to a network of strangers’

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Advice, guidance and things to do with bikes

KNOW HOW

BIKES

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Thing of the month

Pando Commando UH jacket £336

When teenage son Lyle said he'd found a 'properly protective' mesh jacket, I scoffed. But this from Pando Moto is superb. Made of Cordura and Balistex (15 times stronger than steel), it comes with level two armour and is CE approved to AAA. In fact, Pando say abrasion is tested at 135kph, not the usual AAA test of 120kph, so they call it AAA+. Feel and quality are ace, and it has a three-year warranty plus a 'crash warranty' – if it's damaged beyond repair, they replace it. Ain't modern kit amazing?

Mike Armitage

pandomoto.com

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE

John Westlake
Proper journo

Discovering lots of essential stuff about the new Husky 801.

Carl Inkley
Huge bike whizz

Relaying wisdom and insight on Triumphs with vast engines.

Carl Stevens
Dirty bike fan

Revealing the kit that saves him in his very many off-road spills.

Ed Armitage
A2 correspondent

Toddling around on a CB500 Hornet and devouring chips.

Ian Martin
Team Bike boss

Reporting on seeing his beloved RC30 going up in smoke.

Mark Graham
Oddities officer

Exposing yet more remarkable machinery to make us go 'ooh'.

[Living with]

Husqva Vitpilen

801
Husqvarna
MICHELIN

MOVE OVER, COMING THROUGH

The 801 headlight arrangement is so good at shifting cars out of fast lanes that I actually checked its adjustment (it was fine). I'm at a loss to explain it – perhaps the funky ring round the main beam somehow wakes people up? Whatever, it's a motorway weapon.

EASY TO TWIDDLE

The forks are fully adjustable and have four clicks of adjustment. But that's fine as they don't significantly alter what is a firm but tolerable base setting. I've ended up on the comfiest setting for both compression and rebound due to the awful state of my local roads.

GLORIOUS FRONT END

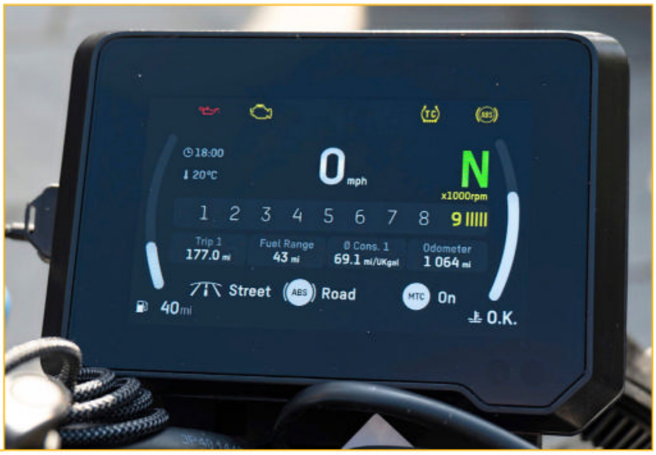
The combination of Michelin Road 6 tyres, WP Apex forks and cock-on geometry results in a gorgeous front-end feel. It's steadfast and confidence-inspiring while still steering fast enough to make it feel agile. The downside is that it eggs you on to ride like a maniac.

REASSURING B-ROAD STABILITY

The 103bhp parallel-twin engine (10bhp up on the one in the KTM 790 Duke) gets the front wheel skimming down bumpy B-roads but I've had no instability issues. Perhaps the steering damper is sorting things out? Or maybe my soft suspension settings stop it kicking off.

rna
n 801

Summer and a naked funster sound like a fine combo. **John Westlake** reveals if that's the case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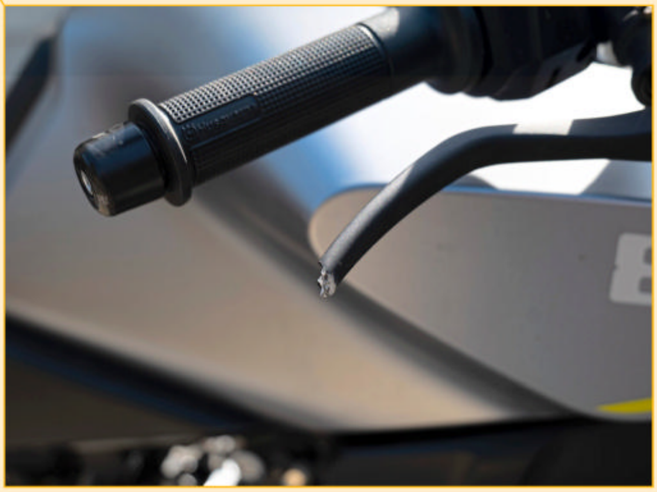
ECONOMY AND ODDNESS

That 69mpg figure was the result of a two-hour, 80mph motorway haul (much faster isn't pleasant due to the lack of screen). For normal B-road tazzing I get 55mpg, which is also pretty impressive. Note the fuel range weirdness – the 801 constantly disagrees with itself.

MICHELIN ROAD 6
180/55 ZR 17

SORT OF PRACTICAL

The riding position is far more comfy than the 790 Duke's, the saddle is good for the 150-mile tank range, and at 180kg it's a doddle to push into the shed. But the lack of screen, bungee hooks and pillion grab handle mean it's no Honda Transalp in the practicality stakes.



OH DEAR

To test its crash resistance I heaved on a luggage strap so idiotically hard that the Husky fell over the other way. Impressively, the fancy fuel tank cover and expensive-looking fork legs didn't go down – the lever and bar end took all the grief. A new front lever is £34.

VITPILEN
801

MARMITE STYLING

Reaction to the 801 is interesting. Most motorcyclists have no idea what it is, then split into two distinct groups. If they're under 40, they tend to admire the avant garde looks. If not, there's quite a lot of 'what's that for?' accompanied by prodding of the tank cover.

[Knowledge]

New bikes

Clip-ons mean a tasty new top yoke, too

Should have been yella like the '94 bike...

Triumph Speed Triple 1200 RX

British supernaked goes back to its café racer roots... well, sort of

What's new? The RX is a limited run (1200 examples) of the already premium Speed Triple RS, and features clip-on handlebars for a more plugged-in riding position – like they had on the 1994 original – plus an electronic Öhlins steering damper for more stability, a sportier riding position, racy paint job and some carbon fibre. It costs £18,995 ready to rock and roll, and should be in your local dealer now-ish.

***Bike's* opinion** The spruced-for-this-year RS is bonkers speedy and – thanks to its new posh suspension – bearably usable. The RX has the same classy ride and face-melting 180bhp grunt, but is more focused and keen to devour corners – the handlebars are lower and two inches further away, and the footpegs are both higher and further back. This makes it noticeably more aggressive than the RS, but not as extreme as the discontinued half-faired RR. Great for attacking corners on a race track, as at this riding launch, but possibly less enticing on your regular rutted B-roads... although, if you're after full-on superbike performance this is still comfier than a race replica. But we can't help feeling it's a shame Triumph haven't done more to distinguish the limited-run RX from the RS (and the Street Triples, for that matter) – see one parked up and it doesn't shout 'different'.

Perfect for nipping to Tesco too, probably

Aprilia Tuono V4 1100 Factory

Bigger, cleverer, smoother, sharper, more, more, more

What's new? Aprilia have swapped the 1077cc V4 for one measuring 1099cc, with a claimed 178bhp. New suspension linkage raises the rear end by 12mm, the shock has a stiffer spring and increased damping, and they've refined the many electronic whatnots. New bodywork, too.
***Bike's* opinion** The Tuono Factory has always had a romping midrange and confidence-swelling front end. It's our favourite super-duper-naked. Now it's even more composed and easier to flick about – it glides around a track with such ease it feels like cheating. Extra oomph below 6000rpm makes it amazingly tractable, and the electronics and throttle are near perfect. Not cheap at £18,950, but fabulous.

Blue wheels! Yes! Get in

Yamaha MT-07

Yamaha's bestseller gets polished up to keep it fresh

What's new? It's the same burbling 689cc parallel twin as before, but now with ride-by-wire throttle, a stiffer chassis with improved suspension, a stiffer frame and style tweaks. Oh, and a TFT display.
***Bike's* opinion** There wasn't much wrong with the old MT. The changes have been driven by fancier rivals from Honda, Triumph and Suzuki, and they put the Yam back at the head of the table. It feels more mature and competent, but keeps the fun and friendly nature that's always made it so appealing. It costs £7704 (don't forget the four) and they'll shift oodles of 'em.

It's a muscly torque-monster like no other

[Why I love my…]

2013 Triumph Rocket III

Yes it's massive 2300cc lump. But it's also massively appealing, says **Carl Inkley**

I used to be a Yamaha V-Max fan – I've always liked my bikes to be out of the ordinary. Then 18 years ago I took a Rocket out for a test ride and by third gear I was hooked. Even now, when I jump on one I can't help smiling. The torque is immense, but it's controllable and the bike does what you want. People say they don't handle, but they do – they're not an R1, but they go where you point them.

After a while my gearbox went and I rebuilt it, and then built a custom. Then people started bringing me Rockets to fix and it's gone from there [Carl runs a workshop called Just Rockets]. I serviced a nice one this morning and have just taken it for a test ride and it put a grin on my face almost straight away. Just lovely.

They do have gearbox problems, though. The early silver-engined ones can jump out of second gear because the undercut on the gears isn't enough and that can bend the selector fork. The later black-engined ones were upgraded, but they can jump out of fourth gear.

Fixing it is a £2500 engine-out job – I replace the gears with Triumph ones that I get machined with more undercut. I must have fixed well over 200 Rocket gearboxes and I've never had a problem with them after that.

They're a bit agricultural inside the engine – it's a car engine basically – but a lot of people ride round for ten of thousands of miles with no problems. I just see the bad ones.

> 'By third gear I was hooked'

But overall, if you want something out of the ordinary there's nothing like it. The new version is a lovely machine – very smooth – but it doesn't have the presence or character of the original one. It feels like a FS1-E by comparison. And the camaraderie in the owners club is fantastic too – I've been chairman for eight years now…

» If you need your Rocket attending to, find Carl at JustRockets.co.uk

Buying tips

» What to look If it's an early bike make sure it stays in second gear. Also check the rear drive shaft seal and the finish on chrome bits. Some owners also report ignition switch bother. Obviously, the Rocket eats tyres and pads, too.
» What to pay from £4750
» Insurance mcncompare.com

MCN COMPARE

Listings

This isn't a limp brochure-style round-up of all the bikes you can buy. No, your guide is far more useful as it **only contains bikes that we have tested**, with comparable on-the-road prices plus data, expert opinion and must-know detail gathered by fussy full-time testers. We do hundreds of thousands of miles, dyno, datalog, weigh and answer the big questions. Don't buy a new bike without reading this first.

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
APRILIA uk.aprilia.com, 00800 15565500 *Bike's* choice: Tuono Factory defines the supernaked class… but we'd buy an RS660								
RSV4 Factory	**£23,150**	**1099cc V4**	**186mph***	**214bhp****	**45mpg**	Ace engine, great suspension and electronics, exemplary steering. Also tiny, and depreciates.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
Tuono V4 Factory	**£18,950**	**1099cc V4**	**165mph**	**178bhp**	**35mpg**	Superb motor, crisp chassis, exotic-yet-friendly. Cool. Non-Factory model is everyday usable.	**10/10**	**Aug '25**
Tuareg 660	**£10,750**	**659cc twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**59mpg****	Ténéré rival is less rounded but has more tech and better suspension. Rugged, fun, but a bit raw.	**8/10**	**Oct '22**
RS660	**£10,450**	**659cc twin**	**139mph**	**91bhp**	**45mpg**	Sportsbike handling, punch and tech; sports-tourer comfort and usability. Impressive thing.	**10/10**	**Dec '24**
Tuono 660	**£9,850**	**659cc twin**	**135mph***	**90bhp***	**50mpg**	Comfier and more agile than RS660, more fun than a Street Triple. Fancier Factory version £10k.	**9/10**	**Jun '21**
BENELLI benelli.com, 0844 4128450 *Bike's* choice: not ridden it yet, but the Leoncino 800 Trail looks tidy…								
TRK 502	**£4,938**	**500cc twin**	**95mph***	**46bhp****	**72mpg****	Lacks a little balance and refinement, but good value distance tool. Italy's best-selling big bike.	**6/10**	**Mar '18**
BIMOTA bimotauk.co.uk, 01603 920240 *Bike's* choice: radical, extreme, whacky, beautiful… who wouldn't want a Tesi?								
Tesi H2	**£59,000**	**998cc V4**	**190mph***	**237bhp****	**28mpg**	Epic supercharged motor in delicious hub-steered chassis. Exquisite, wild, thirsty, expensive.	**8/10**	**Sep '21**
BMW bmw-motorrad.co.uk, 0800 777155 *Bike's* choice: yeah, it's predictable… but brilliance of the GS can't be ignored								
R18 Classic	**£19,540**	**1802cc flat twin**	**115mph***	**91bhp****	**51mpg**	Ace boxer cruiser spoilt a tad by its slightly Harley-ish screen and bags, but still a tidy device.	**8/10**	**May '21**
R18	**£17,480**	**1802cc flat twin**	**113mph**	**87bhp**	**50mpg**	Top mix of modernity, quality and tradition. Roctane model (£22k) has less bling, more handling.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
K1600GT	**£21,100**	**1649cc inline 6**	**154mph****	**158bhp****	**48mpg****	Magical motor, amazing agility, self-levelling suspension, all the toys… It's a sporty-super-tourer.	**9/10**	**Jul '22**
R1300GS TE	**£18,465**	**1300cc flat twin**	**135mph****	**138bhp**	**49mpg**	Less weight, more oomph, fancy toys – it's the best big GS yet. But the Ducati Multi' V4 is slicker…	**9/10**	**Jul '24**
R1250RT	**£17,350**	**1254cc flat twin**	**142mph**	**117bhp**	**50mpg**	Go-to tourer isn't to all tastes but you can't argue that the variable-valve radar-shod twin is top.	**9/10**	**Dec '21**
R1250RS SE	**£15,410**	**1254cc flat twin**	**139mph**	**127bhp**	**50mpg**	Fast, comfy, accomplished, lots of tech – sports-tourers aren't dead. Not perfect, but it's close.	**9/10**	**May '20**
R1250R	**£12,330**	**1254cc flat twin**	**150mph***	**134bhp****	**60mpg****	Ace variable-valve motor in friendly, comfy, capable chassis. Better pure road bike than a GS?	**9/10**	**Aug '19**
R12 nineT	**£14,420**	**1170cc flat twin**	**140mph***	**108bhp****	**55mpg****	High-quality retro with thumping twin, solid handling, top details, and more tech than ever. Ace.	**9/10**	**May '24**
M1000RR	**£36,040**	**999cc inline 4**	**195mph***	**209bhp***	**36mpg***	Wild homologation exotica with stupid power and wings – yet you can ride it to work. Mind-blowing.	**9/10**	**Dec '23**
M1000XR	**£22,580**	**999cc inline 4**	**173mph**	**190bhp**	**42mpg**	Adventure meets WSB. Epic... but a bit vibey and no luggage options. Not sure why you'd want it.	**7/10**	**Oct '24**
S1000RR Sport	**£18,610**	**999cc inline 4**	**190mph***	**207bhp****	**44mpg****	Amazing mix of insane performance and usability, but latest one not quite as friendly as it used to be.	**9/10**	**Feb '25**
S1000XR TE	**£18,340**	**999cc inline 4**	**155mph**	**161bhp**	**43mpg**	High-rise sportsbike. Fast, agile, well equipped. Also got an odd seat. Very good, but not perfect.	**8/10**	**May '25**
S1000R Sport	**£15,315**	**999cc inline 4**	**167mph**	**163bhp**	**48mpg**	Not shouty, but epic: agility, ride, engine and spec are superb. M1000R (£19,480) not worth extra.	**10/10**	**Aug '22**
F900XR	**£10,890**	**895cc twin**	**125mph***	**103bhp**	**57mpg**	Easy-to-use Tracer rival with eager twin, fit chassis. Better value than ever, but the Yam is better.	**7/10**	**Aug '25**
F900GS	**£11,995**	**895cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**60mpg****	Better on road and trail than previous 850. Not full of character, but the best GS for greenlaning.	**8/10**	**May '24**
F750GS	**£8,995**	**853cc twin**	**110mph***	**76bhp**	**69mpg****	Slim front tyre and 19in wheel make this detuned 850 a better road bike. But lacks some 'wow'.	**7/10**	**May '18**
BSA bsacompany.co.uk *Bike's* choice: there's only one model so far, good job it's quite compelling…								
Gold Star	**£5,171**	**652cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp**	**58mpg**	A2-legal retro with '50s style, decent quality and iconic badge. For laid-back Sunday pootles.	**8/10**	**Jul '25**
CCM ccm-motorcycles.com, 01204 544930 *Bike's* choice: of the various Spitfire variants the flat-tracker models look coolest								
Spitfire Bobber	**£12,767**	**600cc single**	**100mph***	**55bhp****	**56mpg**	Curious mix of laid-back bobber styling with stiff chassis and revvy power. Not mega, but good.	**8/10**	**Jan '20**
Street Moto	**£9995**	**600cc single**	**100mph***	**55bhp****	**55mpg***	Punchy, simple, light back-lane tool. Fun, not practical. R (11,495) has light wheels, posh shock.	**8/10**	**Dec '24**
CFMOTO cfmoto.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Chinese bikes come of age – 450MT is a seriously good A2 adventurist								
800NK Sport	**£6,171**	**799cc twin**	**130mph***	**94bhp****	**45mpg***	Basically it's KTM 790 Duke with a few different parts and fresh looks. It's good and it's cheap.	**8/10**	**Nov '23**
700CL-X Heritage	**£5,171**	**693cc twin**	**117mph**	**64bhp****	**55mpg**	Chirpy, fun, usable, good spec, long warranty. It's good… but no longer cheap next to finer rivals.	**7/10**	**Mar '23**
450MT	**£5,699**	**449cc twin**	**112mph***	**46bhp****	**65mpg***	As good as a Ténéré on trails, extremely robust, good spec, keen price. Why buy anything else?	**9/10**	**Mar '25**
450SR S	**£5,699**	**449cc twin**	**115mph***	**46bhp****	**65mpg**	Eager yet smooth motor, agile handling, single-sider, TFT... it's as sporty as A2 gets. Impressive.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
DUCATI ducatiuk.com, 0845 718500 *Bike's* choice: effective, fun and funky, the DesertX is so damn desirable								
Multistrada V4 Rally	**£24,367**	**1158cc V4**	**155mph***	**170bhp****	**43mpg****	Most sophisticated, rounded, clever Ducati ever. Staggeringly complete. Pricey, yes. Also epic.	**10/10**	**Mar '25**
Diavel V4	**£24,167**	**1158cc V4**	**150mph***	**166bhp****	**44mpg****	Caricature looks, raked stance, wild power, silly tail lights. And amazing. Not for everyone, mind.	**8/10**	**Apr '23**
Panigale V4 S	**£27,651**	**1103cc V4**	**191mph**	**203bhp**	**39mpg**	Stupid-fast, sharp, needs working to get the best out, but still feels mega to 'normal' folk. Wow.	**9/10**	**Apr '25**
Streetfighter V4 S	**£23,661**	**1103cc V4**	**169mph**	**181bhp**	**34mpg**	Fast, sexy, loud, desirable… but constantly a full-on experience. SP2 version (£32k) even sillier.	**8/10**	**Jul '24**
Scrambler 1100 Pro	**£12,051**	**1079cc V-twin**	**110mph***	**83bhp****	**45mpg***	1100 Evo-engined, easy-riding Scrambler has charming twin and more comfort than 800s.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
Panigale V4 R	**£39,151**	**998cc V4**	**195mph***	**215bhp****	**35mpg****	Screaming, sharp, ballistic homologation tool. Amazing. But cheaper S is as good for most of us.	**8/10**	**Nov '23**
DesertX	**£17,467**	**937cc V-twin**	**130mph***	**110bhp****	**41mpg**	Sexy dual-purpose tool perfectly balances road and off-road needs. Our 2022 Bike of the Year.	**10/10**	**Oct '22**
SuperSport 950	**£16,367**	**937cc V-twin**	**145mph***	**113bhp****	**43mpg**	Not super fast or whizzpop, but a top, usable, sporty (and overlooked) road bike for normal folk.	**9/10**	**Jan '18**
Monster	**£11,767**	**937cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**110bhp****	**45mpg***	Light, fun, usable, quality roadster with badge appeal. Mega. SP (£14k) sharper but less usable.	**10/10**	**Feb '22**
Panigale V2 S	**£17,167**	**890cc V-twin**	**160mph***	**118bhp****	**53mpg****	Lighter, friendlier and less 'grr' than any previous Ducati sportsbike, but still slick and fast. Ace.	**9/10**	**May '25**
Streetfighter V2 S	**£16,151**	**890cc V-twin**	**160mph***	**118bhp****	**53mpg****	Less power, speed and edge than before – and better for it. Still a Ducati, but the friendliest yet.	**8/10**	**Aug '25**
Multistrada V2 S	**£16,562**	**890cc V-twin**	**145mph***	**114bhp****	**47mpg**	Refined like no Ducati twin before. Also comfy, swift, high-tech and top quality. Pricey but mega.	**9/10**	**Apr '25**
Scrambler Icon	**£10,367**	**803cc V-twin**	**123mph**	**72bhp***	**47mpg**	Image and quality matched by much-improved dynamic. Easy in town, great on back roads.	**8/10**	**Jan '24**
Hyper' 698 Mono	**£12,367**	**659cc single**	**123mph**	**76bhp****	**59mpg**	Fruitiest single ever is light, responsive, engaging. But it craves twisty roads and a skilled rider.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
FANTIC fanticmotoruk.com *Bike's* choice: there are three versions of the Cabellero, but just go for the best colour (so that's the Scrambler)								
Caballero 700	**£9,671**	**689cc twin**	**115mph***	**74bhp****	**46mpg***	Retro scrambler built around Yam's great MT-07 motor. Good, has its moments… but not ace.	**7/10**	**Jan '24**

That's quite a lot

» Having screwed together their first proper motorcycle in 1949 – the fabulously titled Dream D-type – Honda have gone on to make quite a few more. In fact, they recently made an Activa scooter that had the privilege of being their 500 millionth powered two-wheeler. Yes, as in 500,000,000. It took Honda 48 years to make the first 100 million; the gap between the 400 millionth bike and this 500 millionth is just six years – and that's despite the decline in production during Covid. This is why they're The Big H.

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES
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** *Claimed* * *Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
Caballero 500	**£6,121**	**449cc single**	**100mph***	**43bhp****	**60mpg**	Rev-happy, ex-enduro single in a light, good-quality package. Frantic on long rides, but top fun.	**8/10**	**Oct '19**
HARLEY-DAVIDSON harley-davidson.com, 0871 6412508 *Bike's* choice: the Fat Bob has looks, finish, good ride… and funny name								
CVO Street Glide	**£40,495**	**1977cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**120bhp***	**50mpg**	Best ever H-D tourer. Refined, classy, with huge grunt and nimbleness. Unique experience.	**9/10**	**Jan '24**
Low Rider S	**£19,795**	**1868cc V-twin**	**115mph**	**93bhp***	**50mpg****	Top looks and noise, more fun to ride than you think. But better in California than Croydon.	**6/10**	**Jan '20**
CVO Road Glide	**£40,495**	**1923cc V-twin**	**105mph***	**105bhp****	**43mpg****	The defining H-D full-dress tourer with extra bling. Luxurious, surprising, expensive… unique.	**8/10**	**Sep '23**
Street Glide Special	**£27,495**	**1745cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**40bhp***	**45mpg***	Classic looks, decent suspension, good finish and latest 8v motor is the best yet. Fine thing.	**8/10**	**Dec '16**
Breakout	**£25,195**	**1745cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**75bhp***	**50mpg****	Low-slung, drag-inspired cruiser that rides better than expected. Classy, refined hot-rod.	**8/10**	**Dec '17**
Street Bob	**£14,995**	**1745cc V-twin**	**110mph***	**75bhp***	**50mpg****	Classic chopper-ish lines, clean handling, modern 8v power. But Fat Bob is far better.	**6/10**	**Dec '17**
Low Rider ST	**£21,295**	**1923cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**106bhp**	**40mpg***	Stonking motor, surprising handling, bold style, lovely finish. Odd riding position, otherwise fab.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**
Pan America Special	**£17,295**	**1252cc V-twin**	**135mph****	**148bhp****	**43mpg**	Comfy, composed, brisk, lots of equipment. Very good, but not quite a GS or Multistrada rival.	**8/10**	**Sep '21**
Sportster S	**£15,145**	**1252cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**119bhp****	**50mpg**	Fastest, smoothest, best handling, most techy Harley cruiser ever. Ace… but lacks the H-D feel.	**8/10**	**Nov '21**
Nightster Special	**£14,495**	**975cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**89bhp****	**52mpg****	Smallest engine in H-D's range. Decent looks, modern ride, but lacks Harley soul. A bit… odd.	**6/10**	**Aug '22**
HONDA honda.co.uk/motorcycles, 0845 2008000 *Bike's* choice: Hornet's good, Blade's epic… but have you ridden an NT1100? Great tool								
GL1800 Gold Wing Tour	**£25,649**	**1833cc flat-six**	**112mph**	**125bhp****	**51mpg**	Huge, OTT, but smart suspension, toys and utter refinement mean it's still the grand-tour king.	**8/10**	**Dec '22**
CBR1000RR-R Blade SP	**£23,499**	**1000cc inline 4**	**185mph***	**215bhp****	**42mpg****	Revvy, focused, full of HRC-ness. But also refined, classy, and more usable than you think.	**9/10**	**Feb '25**
Africa Twin Adv' Sport	**£17,649**	**1084cc twin**	**130mph***	**94bhp**	**44mpg**	All the tech, plush optional semi-active, classy feel, huge range. And daft switchgear. Hey-ho.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
Africa Twin	**£13,049**	**1084cc twin**	**130mph***	**94bhp**	**47mpg**	Feels like a big, refined enduro bike, so is different to a GS. Cheaper too. Daft switches and dash.	**8/10**	**Jul '24**
NT1100	**£14,099**	**1084cc twin**	**123mph**	**97bhp**	**52mpg**	Cross between Africa Twin and Deauville. Not exciting, but high-spec, plush, quietly ace tourer.	**9/10**	**May '25**
CMX1100 Rebel	**£6,135**	**1084cc twin**	**125mph***	**86bhp****	**52mpg**	Africa Twin motor in cheery, usable, well-made cruiser. Not plush, but fun and very affordable.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
CB1000 Hornet SP	**£9,999**	**1000cc inline 4**	**150mph***	**155bhp**	**48mpg****	Powerful, fine spec, classy ride, and top fun. Ace. Makes all other supernakeds look expensive.	**9/10**	**Jul '25**
XL750 Transalp	**£9,999**	**755cc twin**	**135mph***	**91bhp***	**58mpg**	Smooth, easy to ride, great ergonomics, and cool colours. But revvy twin doesn't suit the bike.	**8/10**	**Aug '23**
CB750 Hornet	**£6,999**	**755cc twin**	**140mph***	**91bhp****	**65mpg****	Simple, honest, fun, great spec, class-leading power – and affordable too. But GSX-8S is nicer…	**9/10**	**Jul '23**
X-ADV	**£11,249**	**745cc twin**	**105mph***	**54bhp****	**70mpg***	Off-road scooter you'll never take off-road. Pricey too. But also practical, enjoyable and top fun.	**8/10**	**Mar '25**
Forza 750	**£9,999**	**745cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**70mpg**	Capable bike with looks and practicality of a scooter. And DCT. Odd concept, ace execution.	**9/10**	**May '21**
NC750X	**£7,849**	**745cc twin**	**115mph***	**58bhp****	**70mpg**	Flexible twin, big mpg, agile, clever storage. Not flash, but very useful. DCT (£830) is worth it.	**10/10**	**Nov '21**
CBR650R E-Clutch	**£9,899**	**649cc inline 4**	**138mph**	**86bhp**	**54mpg**	Flexible, handsome, fun, fast-enough road sportsbike. Smart auto clutch is genuinely useful.	**8/10**	**Aug '24**
CB650R	**£9,399**	**649cc inline 4**	**140mph**	**93bhp****	**50mpg**	Naked version of CBR (above) is fabulously balanced. Quality, dynamic, value all superb.	**9/10**	**May '19**
CBR600RR	**£10,529**	**599cc inline 4**	**170mph***	**119bhp****	**52mpg****	Shrieking power, epic agility, pinpoint steering, top quality. Tiny and demanding, yes. But mega.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
GB350S	**£3,949**	**348cc single**	**85mph***	**21bhp****	**70mpg****	Charming retro with old-school quality. A lot slower than a Speed 400, but plush, classy, cheap.	**8/10**	**Jun '25**
CRF300L	**£5,829**	**286cc single**	**80mph***	**27bhp****	**70mpg***	Fit green-laner, easy commuter, bit quicker than old 250. Rally (£6499) has big tank and screen.	**7/10**	**Aug '22**
Super Cub	**£3,869**	**125cc single**	**65mph***	**9.2bhp**	**124mpg**	Descendent of iconic step-thru' is charming. Ownership by urban folk should be compulsory.	**8/10**	**Jul '19**
HUSQVARNA husqvarnamotorcycles.com/gb *Bike's* choice: Supermoto is desirable, funky, silly… and yet usable day-to-day								
Norden 901	**£12,699**	**889cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**63mpg****	Attractive reworking of KTM 890 Adventure. Capable, nicely made, but lacks a 'wow' moment.	**7/10**	**Oct '22**
Svartpilen 801	**£10,499**	**799cc twin**	**130mph***	**104bhp****	**50mpg***	KTM 790 Duke motor in a classier, calmer chassis. Not cheap, but refined, good spec, nice feel.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
701 Supermoto	**£10,399**	**693cc single**	**121mph**	**71bhp**	**54mpg**	Engaging, fun at sensible speed, frugal, sexy, friendlier than it looks. Proper middleweight tool.	**9/10**	**Sep '17**
701 Enduro	**£12,299**	**693cc single**	**120mph***	**71bhp**	**54mpg**	Proper dirt bike, yet refined, frugal and plush on the road. Big-tank LR (long range) version, too.	**9/10**	**Apr '19**
Svartpilen 401	**£5,599**	**375cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp****	**65mpg***	Built for A2 riders avoiding the mainstream. Essentially KTM's fine 390 Duke with more style.	**7/10**	**Jul '18**
INDIAN indianmotorcycle.co.uk *Bike's* choice: classic character, modern quality, unique feel – Scout is a standout cruiser								
Chief Dark Horse	**£15,195**	**1890cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**89bhp***	**60mpg**	Big twin has stripped-back cool, walloping drive, surprising agility. Engaging trad' cruiser.	**8/10**	**Feb '24**
Chieftain PowerPlus	**£27,595**	**1834cc V-twin**	**125mph***	**127bhp****	**40mpg***	Huge bagger with hugely grunty (134 lb.ft) and refined motor, full bling and tech. Even handles.	**9/10**	**May '25**
Challenger	**£21,766**	**1770cc V-twin**	**112mph****	**122bhp***	**46mpg***	Full-on tourer with ace water-cooled motor, physics-defying chassis, full tech. Watch out, H-D.	**8/10**	**Jan '20**
101 Scout	**£16,095**	**1250cc V-twin**	**120mph**	**110bhp**	**40mpg***	Impressive mix of trad' cruiser flair and sporty (ish) credentials. Engaging, amusing, classy.	**8/10**	**Aug '24**
FTR1200R Carbon	**£16,695**	**1203cc V-twin**	**140mph***	**123bhp****	**38mpg**	Stylish, high-quality, sporty retro with ace V-twin. We preferred it with the old 19in wheel, mind.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
KAWASAKI kawasaki.co.uk, 01628 856750 *Bike's* choice: has to be the Ninja Z H2. Friendly, usable, yet suitably deranged								
Versys 1000 SE GT	**£17,468**	**1043cc inline 4**	**144mph**	**118bhp****	**42mpg**	Top-spec Versys with all the toys, luxurious ride, luggage… Ace two-up tourer, but expensive.	**7/10**	**Feb '24**
Versys 1100 SE GT	**£17,349**	**1099cc inline 4**	**144mph**	**119bhp**	**40mpg**	Gutsy, high-rise, high-spec 'adventure tourer'. Ace pillion bike. Lacks wow factor, but a class act.	**8/10**	**Apr '25**
Ninja 1100SX	**£14,999**	**1099cc inline 4**	**149mph**	**124bhp**	**41mpg**	UK's fave sports tourer is smooth, refined, well equipped. Bit dated? Who cares – it's still great.	**9/10**	**Apr '25**
Ninja H2 SX SE	**£25,815**	**998cc inline 4**	**186mph***	**197bhp****	**39mpg**	Sports-touring exotica. Not perfect, but classy, usable, and that motor… Base H2 SX is £21,735.	**8/10**	**Jun '19**
Z H2 SE	**£17,667**	**998cc inline 4**	**175mph***	**197bhp****	**34mpg**	The impressive Z H2 (below) with fine semi-active ride. It's the thinking rider's supernaked.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
Z H2	**£17,465**	**998cc inline 4**	**175mph***	**197bhp****	**34mpg**	Mega blown H2 motor in bespoke naked chassis. Far more road focus than supernaked rivals.	**8/10**	**Oct '20**
Ninja ZX-10RR	**£25,971**	**998cc inline 4**	**180mph**	**189bhp**	**44mpg**	The already-capable ZX-10R with tuned motor and fancy wheels: basically a base for racing.	**9/10**	**Jun '18**
Z900RS	**£11,522**	**948cc inline 4**	**143mph**	**102bhp**	**51mpg**	Z900 in retro clobber. And better for it – dynamic, feel and detail are great. SE (£13k) even better.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
Z900	**£9,371**	**948cc inline 4**	**145mph***	**123bhp****	**52mpg****	If you grew up on inline fours, this is ace. Not as punchy as MT-09, but very good and well priced.	**7/10**	**Apr '25**
Z650RS	**£8,115**	**649cc twin**	**130mph***	**67bhp****	**65mpg****	Spot-on mix of modern Z650's abilities with cool '70s retro vibe. £150 extra for green? Worth it.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**

Diverted traffic

» Like taking a detour? Move to Scotland. To be precise, move to Edinburgh. According to roadwork and closure data acquired by online tyre sellers Blackcircles, Edinburgh spends the most time tinkering with tarmac – in 2024 the local authority took an average of 80 days to complete each roadwork. Mind you, on Southwark, London, a road repair that started in 2017 still hasn't been finished at the time of writing. The place with the fewest roadworks? Blackpool. Which could also mean they look after them the worst…

Listings

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES

BLUE = Available just on iPad
RED = Available on iPad and Android
ORANGE = Available in print only

** *Claimed* * *Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
Versys 650	£7,422	649cc twin	115mph*	62bhp*	54mpg*	Twin-cylinder all-rounder is knocking on, but latest extras keep it valid. Fine multi-purpose tool.	8/10	Aug '22
Vulcan S	£7,615	649cc twin	115mph*	61bhp**	63mpg*	Affordable, good-looking, modern cruiser with ER-6 power. Surprising ability, keen price.	8/10	Jan '22
Ninja 650	£6,967	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	70mpg*	Z650 dressed up in ZX-10R costume. Comfy, easy-to-ride, cheery twin for J. Rea wannabes.	9/10	May '17
Z650	£7,665	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp*	70mpg*	Zed is fun, fit, frugal. Nice, but lacks sparkle next to a Hornet, MT-07 or Trident. It's knocking on…	7/10	May '23
Ninja 7 HEV	£11,949	451cc twin	115mph*	58bhp**	85mpg	World's first hybrid. Frugal,smooth, effortless on elec power. But also heavy, steady and pricey.	7/10	Jan '24
ZX-4RR	£8,699	399cc four	130mph*	76bhp**	50mph*	Not A2, but a single-minded screaming race-rep. Small, demanding but also fabulous fun.	8/10	Apr '24
KOVE kovemotouk.com *Bike's* choice: surprising 800X rivals the Ténéré as a real dual-purpose tool. Fine thing								
800X Pro	£8,499	799cc twin	130mph*	81bhp	51mpg	KTM 790-based motor, great chassis, fine spec. Not perfect, but ruddy close – it's superb value.	9/10	Oct '24
510X	£5,999	498cc twin	110mph*	47bhp**	60mpg*	Impressive spec, decent performance, big tank, attractive price. Credible A2 adventure bike.	8/10	Nov '24
KTM ktm.co.uk *Bike's* choice: practical, verging on sensible, but also very silly. It's the 890 SMT for us, please								
Super Adventure R	£18,199	1301cc V-twin	155mph*	158bhp**	44mpg	Like a rocket-powered 'crosser with cruise, Bluetooth and comfort. Mega… but Multi' V4 better.	9/10	Nov '23
1290 Super Duke GT	£16,803	1301cc V-twin	159mph	158bhp	45mpg	Mad power, sports handling, all the toys and eats miles. Couple of iffy bits, otherwise ace.	9/10	Jan '19
1390 Super Duke R Evo	£17,622	1350cc V-twin	165mph	178bhp	42mpg	Mighty fast yet friendly, sharp but safe, and loads of gizmos. Surprisingly usable supernaked.	9/10	Mar '23
990 Duke	£10,246	947cc twin	145mph*	121bhp**	60mpg**	More mature and finer quality than earlier Dukes, but still loopy. KTM's best naked… but pricey.	9/10	Jan '25
890 SMT	£11,434	899cc twin	130mph**	103bhp*	63mpg	Sharper and more engaging than an adventure bike, more practical than a naked. And a bit silly.	8/10	Feb '24
890 Adventure	£11,999	889cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	63mpg**	The previous 790 with extra bhp, smoother delivery, tweaked chassis, more tech. Very good.	8/10	Jan '21
690 Enduro R	£9,835	690cc single	115mph*	73bhp**	60mpg*	Super-clever Duke/Husky 701 lump in long-legged trailie. Pukka, classy, dual-purpose tool.	8/10	Feb '16
390 Adventure	£6,299	373cc single	105mph*	43bhp**	56mpg	Chirpy A2-legal adventurer looks like a 1290 (sort of). But it's basically a 390 Duke in wellies.	8/10	Jul '20
390 Duke	£5,499	373cc single	108mph	41bhp	70mpg*	Revvy, eager motor in agile 125 chassis? Yes. Looks like the 1290 and less toy-like than it was.	7/10	Jun '17
LANGEN langenmotorcycles.co.uk; 01942 724059 *Bike's* choice: there's one model, which limits choice. Luckily it's amazing								
Two Stroke	£32,580	249cc V-twin	130mph*	74bhp**	40mpg*	Pricey, yes. But stroker is deliciously engineered, fast, raw. We love it… but £33k is a lot for a 250.	8/10	Dec '23
MASH mashmotorcycles.co.uk; 01264 889012 *Bike's* choice: go for the X-Ride (but budget for new tyres and suspension)								
650 X-Ride	£4,699	644cc single	90mph*	40bhp**	60mpg*	Ex-Honda Dominator motor in 70s-style trailie. Good quality, keen price, let down by chassis.	5/10	Apr '21
Five Hundred 400	£3,899	398cc single	80mph*	28bhp**	70mpg**	French brand, made in China, Honda-based motor. Iffy details, odd name, but cheap and fun.	6/10	Dec '17
MORBIDELLI morbidelli.co.uk *Bike's* choice: T1002V isn't fancy, but it's capable and remarkable value								
C1002V	£8699	997cc twin	120mph*	94bhp**	52mpg	Superb quality, refined big V-twin, huge spec, bargain price. Shame it lacks ground clearance.	8/10	Jul '25
T1002V	£8199	997cc twin	120mph*	89bhp**	50mpg	Like a V-Strom 1050 with more tech but £5k less. Not fancy, but an ace value adventure-tourer.	8/10	Aug '25
MOTO GUZZI uk.motoguzzi.it *Bike's* choice: unique image, sweet ride, classy quality; it's not fast or clever but V85 is lovely								
V100 Mandello S	£14,900	1042cc V-twin	135mph*	108bhp	50mpg	Sports-tourer is classy, comfy, capable, charismatic. Serious alternative to a Honda or BMW.	9/10	Sep '23
Stelvio	£13,850	1042cc V-twin	135mph*	113bhp**	50mpg*	Brilliant V100 (above) in capable, classy, convincing adventure guise. Not a GS, but very good.	9/10	Nov '24
V85 TT	£11,400	853cc V-twin	120mph*	79bhp**	50mpg*	Fabulous adventure mix of old-school charm, proper tech, comfort, and a cheerful dynamic.	9/10	May '24
V85 Strada	£10,600	853cc V-twin	120mph*	79bhp*	50mph*	Stripped-back V85 has less tech, fewer fixings, but lighter wheels for sharper handling. Decent.	8/10	May '24
V9 Bobber	£9,750	853cc V-twin	110mph*	64bhp**	55mpg*	Pleasing V-twin in a trendy, well-made package. Doesn't sell well so haggle yourself a top deal.	8/10	Jun '16
V7 Special	£8,000	853cc V-twin	115mph*	64bhp**	63mpg	Style, ride and badge all spot-on. 850 V-twin isn't as grunty as a Street Twin, but we forgive it.	9/10	Jul '21
MOTO MORINI motomorini.eu *Bike's* choice: you might need to be brave, but the Milano is a convincingly authentic Morini								
Milano	£12,700	1187cc V-twin	145mph*	114bhp**	42mpg	Instant chunky power, firm and direct chassis, neat 70s paint. Buying is a gamble, but it's cool.	8/10	Nov '19
X-Cape	£6,999	649cc twin	109mph*	59bhp**	49mpg	Made in China with CFMoto engine. Great spec, good quality, rides well. No Ténéré, but cheap.	7/10	Mar '22
MV Agusta mvagusta.co.uk, 0844 4128450 *Bike's* choice: latest Brutale is refined, usable, yet still exotic								
Enduro Veloce	£20,000	931cc inline 3	149mph**	122bhp**	40mpg*	Fast, accurate, inspiring, surprisingly complete adventurer. But no use on trails. Expensive, too.	7/10	Jan '25
Dragster 800 RR SCS	£18,220	798cc inline 3	150mph*	138bhp*	45mpg	Expensive, yes. But also classy, high-spec, comfy, and refined like no MV before. Impressive.	8/10	Jan '22
Superveloce	£18,980	798cc inline 3	160mph*	146bhp**	41mpg	Super-sporty F3 in semi-retro dress. Fast, sharp, sounds top, looks superb, quite demanding.	8/10	Mar '23
Turismo Veloce Rosso	£13,930	798cc inline 3	136mph	110bhp**	48mpg*	Adventure bike? Nah, it's like a high-rise sportsbike. So-so ride, busy dash, but it's good.	8/10	Jan '19
Brutale 800 RR	£15,590	798cc inline 3	153mph**	138bhp**	40mpg**	Top engine, nimble, great looks, ridiculous hard ride. Semi-auto clutch version a bit gimmicky.	6/10	Apr '19
NORTON nortonmotorcycles.com; 0121 565 4411 *Bike's* choice: Think Norton, think Commando… and it's good to ride, too								
V4SV	£44,000	1200cc V4	180mph*	185bhp**	40mpg*	Not as slick as an M1000RR, expensive. So what? Brit sportsbike is solid, fast, beautiful, unique.	8/10	Dec '23
V4CR	£42,000	1200cc V4	175mph*	185bhp**	40mpg*	Sculpted café racer is modern and old-school at the same time. Pricey but effective exotica.	9/10	Oct '23
Commando 961 SP	£16,999	961cc twin	125mph*	77bhp**	40mpg*	Traditional pushrod Brit twin for the modern world. Sweet handling, well made, lots of character.	9/10	Mar '23
ROYAL ENFIELD royalenfield.com/uk; 0844 412 8450 *Bike's* choice: Himalayan 450 is a superb mix of performance, quality and price								
Bear 650	£6,749	648cc twin	110mph*	47bhp**	60mpg*	Splendid Inter' (below) in Scrambler form. Chunky looks, USD forks, longer suspension. Good.	9/10	Mar '25
Interceptor	£6,599	648cc twin	110mph	44bhp	60mpg	Charming twin has authentic feel, fine looks and attractive price. Think Indian-made Guzzi V7.	9/10	Mar '23
Himalayan 450	£5,850	452cc single	90mph*	40bhp**	78mpg**	Rugged, functional appeal, now with more oomph and improved ride and quality. Great bike.	9/10	Jul '24
Guerrilla 450	£4,850	452cc single	100mph*	39bhp**	83mpg	Roadster version of Himi'. Great engine, otherwise a bit 'meh' – not as 'right' as a Speed 400.	7/10	Feb '25
Classic 350	£4,619	349cc single	72mph	19bhp	79mpg	The hugely successful Meteor dressed up like an old Bullet. Easy-going basic Sunday plodder.	7/10	Aug '22
Meteor	£4,219	349cc single	72mph	19bhp	79mpg	Simple, chirpy character, light handling, nicely made, and super cheap. Fast? No way. Fun? Yes.	8/10	Nov '21
SUZUKI suzuki-gb.co.uk; 0845 850 8800 *Bike's* choice: V-Strom 800DE is everything a mid-size adventure should be								
Hayabusa	£18,599	1340cc inline 4	186mph*	187bhp**	42mpg**	There are more powerful bikes. But nothing goes stupid fast with the ease and class of a Busa.	8/10	Jul '22

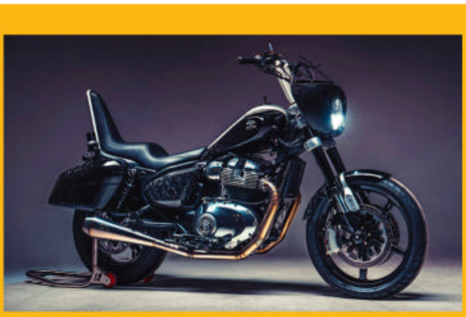
World first at Silverstone

» The premier 500cc/MotoGP class of Grand Prix racing has seen many manufacturers, from Britain, Austria, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic, Japan… and now India. Having already invested €200 million in KTM, massive Indian firm Bajaj (who build the KTM 390 Duke and RC390) are pouring in another €600 million and becoming the controlling majority shareholder. At the British GP the factory KTM RC16s had Bajaj branding on the intake scoops. This is Pedro Acosta going faster than any Bajaj ever has before.

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES
are available digitally on iPad and Android

*** Claimed * Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
V-Strom 1050XT	£13,865	1037cc V-twin	137mph	99bhp	52mpg	Loads of gizmos, amazing screen, plush-yet-secure ride, solid motor. It's no GS… but top value.	8/10	Dec '20
GSX-S1000GX	£14,799	999cc inline 4	145mph**	150bhp*	45mpg*	The GT (below) in adventure-sports guise. Not perfect, but ace suspension, toys, ride and feel.	8/10	Apr '25
GSX-S1000GT	£12,899	999cc inline 4	155mph*	150bhp*	46mpg**	GSX-R oomph, comfort, lots of toys, fine looks. Trad' proper-fast-yet-friendly sports tourer.	8/10	Apr '25
Katana	£12,699	999cc inline 4	152mph	147bhp	46mpg	Superb GSX-S supernaked with sharp 80s-inspired styling. Bold yet usable, and underrated.	8/10	Nov '19
V-Strom 800DE	£13,999	776cc twin	125mph*	83bhp**	52mpg	Gutsy motor, proper comfort, better suspension than rivals, and fine spec list too. Great bike.	9/10	Aug '23
GSX-8R	£8,999	776cc twin	130mph*	82bhp**	52mpg*	Think GSX-R mixed with a commuter. Easy to ride, friendly, but also grunty, agile, plush. Lovely.	9/10	Dec '24
GSX-8S	£8,299	776cc twin	130mph*	82bhp**	50mpg*	Usable grunt, secure handling, fine ride, nicely made. Pricier than MT-07 and Hornet, but better.	9/10	Jul '23
V-Strom 650 XT	£8,965	645cc V-twin	115mph*	60bhp*	45mpg	£700 over the base model (below) gets you hand guards and wire wheels. Worth it for the looks.	7/10	Jul '17
SV650	£7,165	645cc V-twin	122mph	74bhp	50mpg	Chirpy, cheerful, usable, quick, proven, though Yam MT-07 has a bit more zip and charm.	7/10	Apr '19
TRIUMPH triumphmotorcycles.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Speed Twin 1200 isn't perfect, but it's flippin' compelling								
Rocket 3 GT	£22,695	2458cc inline 3	138mph**	165bhp**	35mpg	Huge motor is amazing, handling is ridiculous, but firm ride and sheer bulk limit use as 'real' GT.	8/10	Oct '24
Rocket 3 R	£21,995	2458cc inline 3	138mph**	165bhp**	35mpg	Cruiser? Hardly. With a stiff chassis, handling and crazy grunt, the R is a Mad Max supernaked.	8/10	Oct '24
Tiger 1200 Rally Pro	£18,295	1200cc inline 3	140mph*	148bhp**	55mpg**	Lots of power, tech, comfort and class, and they've stopped the vibes, too. Well done, Triumph.	9/10	Aug '24
Speed Twin 1200 RS	£14,495	1200cc twin	130mph*	96bhp**	50mpg	Part classic thrummer, part wheel-lifting blingy supernaked. Classy, fast, desirable roadster.	9/10	Feb '25
Scrambler 1200 XE	£13,295	1200cc twin	130mph*	89bhp**	56mpg	Easy-going B-lane thrummer is classy, rewarding, sensibly priced. Think retro adventure bike.	8/10	Jan '25
Speedmaster	£12,995	1200cc twin	110mph*	76bhp**	55mpg**	Low-slung Bobber transformed for the USA with beach 'bars, shiny bits and pillion perch.	8/10	Sep '18
Bonneville Bobber	£12,995	1200cc twin	120mph*	77bhp**	56mpg	Oodles of grunt, capable chassis, spot-on stance and feel. Perfect blend of modern and retro.	9/10	Jan '22
Bonneville T120	£11,795	1200cc twin	120mph*	79bhp**	54mpg	Lolloping grunt, steadfast chassis, top finish. Hasn't Street Twin's agility, but has finer ride.	9/10	Sep '18
Speed Triple RR	£17,950	1160cc inline 3	150mph	166bhp	39mpg	RS (below) with fairing, GSX-R riding stance, posh suspension. Discontinued – get one for £13k.	8/10	Jun '22
Speed Triple RS	£17,495	1160cc inline 3	175mph*	178bhp**	38mpg	Awesome motor, ace outright handling, full tech. Mega. Bit stiff and focused for the road, mind.	8/10	Jun '25
Scrambler 900	£9,795	900cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	60mpg	The Bonnie platform in laid-back, urban-ready scrambler form. Charming, if a little bit 'meh'.	7/10	Jan '24
Bonneville T100	£9,595	900cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	60mpg	All the style and easy-going pleasures of the T120. Makes 24bhp less, but is £1900 (!) cheaper.	9/10	Sep '18
Speed Twin 900	£8,795	900cc twin	110mph*	64bhp**	60mpg	Handsome, pleasing, well-made retro with decent grunt and easy-to-flick chassis. Really good.	9/10	Dec '22
Tiger 900 Rally Pro	£14,495	888cc inline 3	130mph*	106bhp**	60mpg**	High-tech, high-spec adventurer really can go (almost) anywhere. Brisk, smooth, plush, lovely.	9/10	Mar '24
Tiger 900 GT Pro	£13,895	888cc inline 3	130mph*	106bhp**	60mpg**	Great spec, comfort, usability, quality. Top adventurer-tourer, but Rally (above) has more pizazz.	9/10	Nov '24
Tiger Sport 800	£10,995	798cc inline 3	130mph*	113bhp**	58mpg	Light, fruity, adaptable, jolly nice. Not *quite* as all-round brilliant as a Tracer 9 GT – but cheaper.	9/10	Aug '25
Street Triple 765 RS	£11,295	765cc inline 3	145mph*	128bhp**	53mpg**	Best road-going sporty bike Triumph have ever made. Ace. Less-blingy R (£10,295) is great too.	9/10	Oct '24
Tiger Sport 660	£8,945	660cc inline 3	135mph*	80bhp**	60mpg**	660 Trident repackaged as a practical high-riding all-rounder. Giant-slaying brilliance.	9/10	Mar '23
Daytona 660	£8,595	660cc inline 3	135mph*	94bhp**	58mpg**	Like a three-cylinder CBR650R. Fit motor, comfy, but not a sharp as rivals. Missing an edge.	8/10	Dec '24
Trident 660	£7,895	660cc inline 3	129mph	75bhp	54mpg	Affordable and friendly like an MT-07, sweet handling like a Street Trip'. Bit stiff, otherwise great..	9/10	May '23
Speed 400	£5,195	398cc single	100mph*	40bhp**	80mpg**	A2-legal bike with ample performance, quality and 'proper Triumph' feel. Big seller for a reason...	9/10	Jun '25
VOGE vogeuk.co.uk, 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: it's not a premium model, but 900's value is remarkable								
DS900X	£8671	895cc twin	125mph*	94bhp**	60mpg*	By Loncin, who make BMW motors. F900GS power, fine ride, staggering spec for the money.	8/10	Jan '25
YAMAHA yamaha-motor.co.uk, 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: sporty and engaging, yet friendly and fun – MT-09 is a proper device								
R1M	£24,460	998cc inline 4	186mph	192bhp	40mpg	MotoGP-derived electronics + track-focused superbike = incredible. Limited availability.	9/10	Feb '21
MT-10 SP	£16,510	998cc inline 4	153mph	152bhp	38mpg	Already amazing MT-10 with R1 SP's electronic suspenders. Great, if not obviously better.	9/10	May '17
MT-10	£14,210	998cc inline 4	153mph	152bhp	38mpg	Not as wild as some rivals, but cheaper, easier to ride, and still epic. Thinking rider's supernaked.	9/10	Aug '22
Niken GT	£16,210	890cc inline 3	117mph	113bhp**	45mpg*	Three-wheeler has more front-end grip than anything, fit motor, fine touring ability Ace, but odd.	8/10	Aug '23
Tracer 9 GT	£14,354	890cc inline 3	135mph*	117bhp**	62mpg	Defining 'mid-size' upright sports tourer. Superb tech, dynamic, noise, comfort… hard to fault.	10/10	Aug '25
XSR900 GP	£12,506	890cc inline 3	135mph*	117bhp**	50mpg*	If this is the future of retro, sign us up. XSR in '80s fag-packet sportsbike form is a glorious thing.	9/10	Sep '24
R9	£12,250	890cc inline 3	135mph*	117bhp**	50mpg*	MT-09 transformed into a sportsbike. It's sharp, accurate, fast, but friendly and usable, too. Top.	9/10	Jun '25
Tracer 9	£11,010	890cc inline 3	146mph	107bhp	47mpg	Adventurer presence, comfort, practicality – it's a top road bike. High-spec GT worth the extra.	9/10	Apr '23
XSR900	£10,610	890cc inline 3	130mph	107bhp	49mpg	Ace MT-09 reworked into a convincing '80s flat-bar superbike. Cool, fun, sexy, but a bit stiff.	9/10	Nov '22
MT-09 SP	£11,310	890cc inline 3	130mph*	117bhp**	48mpg	Öhlins shock, classy forks, R1M paint job, brilliant engine. Superb everyday semi-supernaked.	9/10	Oct '24
MT-09	£10,100	890cc inline 3	130mph*	117bhp**	49mpg*	Top triple has new-found handling prowess and tech, but keeps its usable playfulness. Proper.	9/10	Jan '25
Ténéré 700	£10,404	689cc twin	120mph*	72bhp**	55mpg*	Retakes position as the defining mid-size adventurer. Classy, capable and fun on road or trail.	9/10	Jul '25
Tracer 7	£8,810	689cc twin	125mph*	70bhp	56mpg	Super-fun MT-07 with practical niceties. The datum for all-rounder value. GT even better.	9/10	Aug '20
R7	£8,910	689cc twin	130mph*	72bhp**	56mpg*	More than a faired MT-07. Lacks a bit of wow but properly sporty, ace in corners, fun, affordable.	8/10	Aug '22
XSR700	£8,260	689cc twin	119mph	70bhp	49mpg	MT-07 in period costume. Proof retro looks can work with a modern dynamic. LC paint is great.	9/10	Jun '16
MT-07	£7,510	689cc twin	122mph*	74bhp	48mpg	Polished chassis adds mature edge to the fun and friendliness it's renowned for. Great bike.	9/10	Aug '25
R3	£6,405	321cc twin	102mph*	41bhp**	65mpg	Light, revvy, fun-to-ride, well finished. Ability and spec fight for title of best A2 sportsbike.	8/10	May '19
R125	£5,302	125cc single	80mph*	15bhp	92mpg	R1 looks, big bike feel, clever engine. Easy to see why they sell so many to enthusiastic teens.	8/10	May '19
ZERO zeromotorcycles.com, +31 72 5112014 *Bike's* choice: SR/S is good enough to convert stubborn petrolheads								
SR/S Premium	£20,495	electric motor	124mph**	110bhp**	242mpc	Fast, torquey, smooth, hi-spec, great to ride. Range and charge time bearable. Price a bit salty.	8/10	Jul '22
S	£14,540	electric motor	86mph**	59bhp**	200mpc	Simple commuter has basic chassis, slow charging and ain't cheap, but costs peanuts to run.	6/10	Dec '20



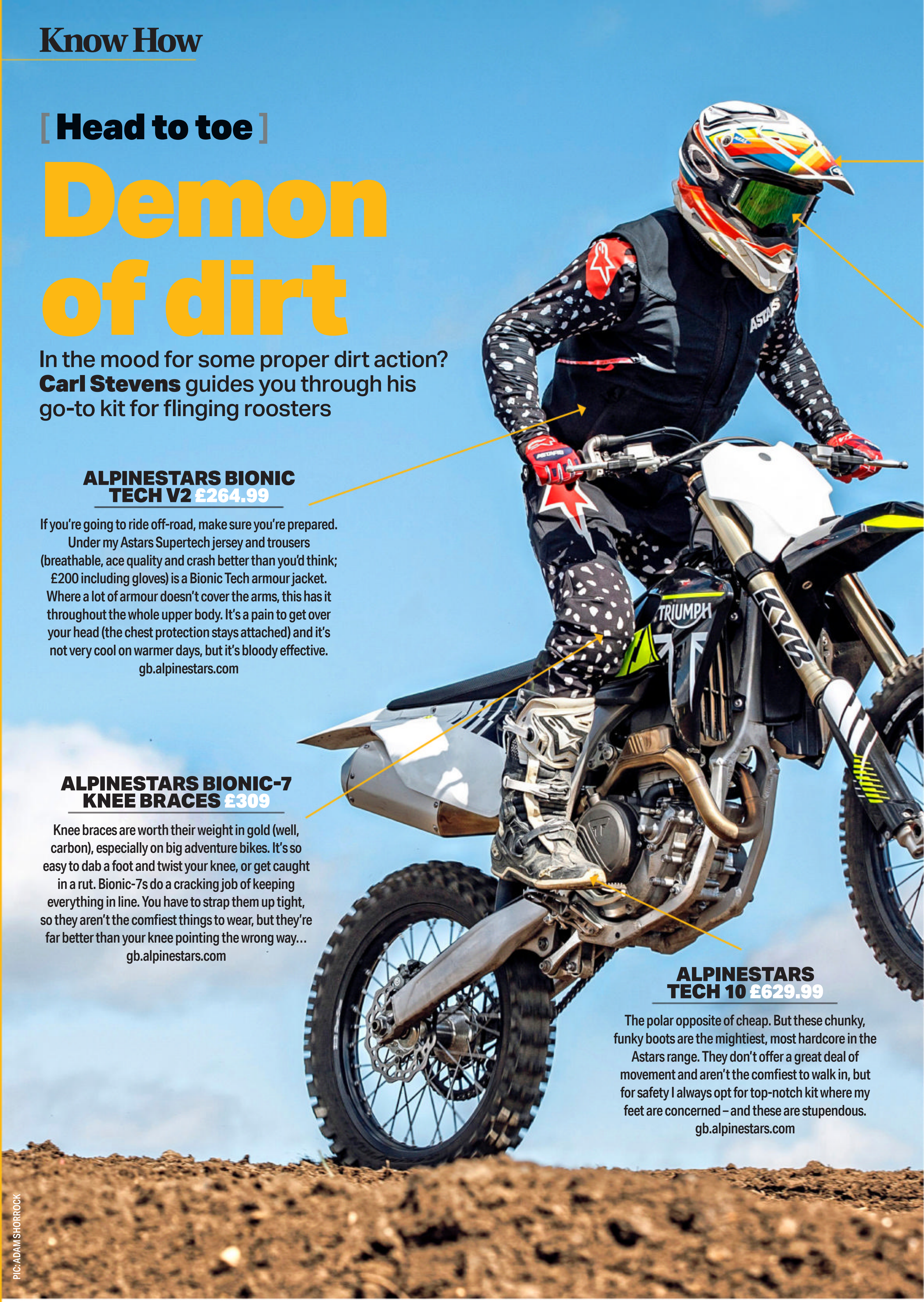
Old school cool

» These days it's all about 'collaboration'. Doesn't matter if it's a singer and coffee brand, or financial advisor and kebab shop. Or indeed a jewellery firm and motorcycle company. London silver 'lifestyle' brand The Great Frog have worked with Royal Enfield to build this Super Meteor 650 custom, and we reckon it's great. Love the mix of bikini fairing, huge bar risers, panniers and radical seat – it's the sort of creation we've not really seen since a local bike show in the 1980s. More, please.

[**Head to toe**]

Demon of dirt

In the mood for some proper dirt action? **Carl Stevens** guides you through his go-to kit for flinging roosters



PIC: ADAM SHORROCK

ALPINESTARS BIONIC TECH V2 £264.99

If you're going to ride off-road, make sure you're prepared. Under my Astars Supertech jersey and trousers (breathable, ace quality and crash better than you'd think; £200 including gloves) is a Bionic Tech armour jacket. Where a lot of armour doesn't cover the arms, this has it throughout the whole upper body. It's a pain to get over your head (the chest protection stays attached) and it's not very cool on warmer days, but it's bloody effective.
gb.alpinestars.com

ALPINESTARS BIONIC-7 KNEE BRACES £309

Knee braces are worth their weight in gold (well, carbon), especially on big adventure bikes. It's so easy to dab a foot and twist your knee, or get caught in a rut. Bionic-7s do a cracking job of keeping everything in line. You have to strap them up tight, so they aren't the comfiest things to wear, but they're far better than your knee pointing the wrong way...
gb.alpinestars.com

ALPINESTARS TECH 10 £629.99

The polar opposite of cheap. But these chunky, funky boots are the mightiest, most hardcore in the Astars range. They don't offer a great deal of movement and aren't the comfiest to walk in, but for safety I always opt for top-notch kit where my feet are concerned – and these are stupendous.
gb.alpinestars.com

SHOEI VXF-WR PINNACLE TC-8 £549.99

It's a full off-road lid, but I love it so much I use it on the road on warmer days. Everything sits nicely: the shell is light and well-shaped, the peak's secure, and ventilation is exceptional. It's been crashed, shipped around the world and endured everything from 40°C heat to snowy winters, and never let me down. After washing the inners at least 20 times they're due for retirement as they're sagging a little. But that's it.
shoeiassured.co.uk

OAKLEY FRONT LINE MX GOGGLES £99

Buy. Great. Goggles. These may be expensive, but they're built to last and the lenses have held up really well to all the muck, rocks and debris thrown their way. The tint is delightful and they never fog up. I'd always opt for goggles over a visor when possible, as they're easier to keep clean and clear.
oakley.com

> 'I always opt for top-notch boots – and these are stupendous'

[Know it all]

Multigrade oil

Jason Davies of Motul explains why you need to know your 10W-40 from your SAE 30

The first engine oils were monogrades so had a single viscosity rating, like SAE 30 or SAE 50. Their key limitation was that they only performed properly in a narrow temperature range – so in cold weather they became too thick to circulate easily, and in hot weather they thinned out and lost protective strength. This often meant changing oil types depending on the season.

Multigrade oils were the answer – Motul launched the first commercially available one in 1953. They use additives called viscosity index improvers that modify how the oil responds to changes in temperature.

A designation like 10W-40 refers to the oil's cold and hot viscosity characteristics. The '10W' indicates how the oil flows in cold temperatures (W stands for Winter) while the '40' indicates the oil's viscosity at operating temperatures (typically 90-100°C).

To create a multigrade oil, a base oil is blended with various additives under heat and pressure. Modern engine oils contain a wide range of additives beyond viscosity modifiers: anti-foam agents, detergents to suspend contaminants, dispersants to prevent sludge, antioxidants to resist breakdown from heat, anti-wear additives, corrosion inhibitors, and more.

Motorcycle oils must meet additional demands. In most motorcycles, the engine oil also lubricates the gearbox and clutch (unlike cars, which usually have a separate transmission). This places greater mechanical stress on the oil and means it must contain additives suited to high-pressure gear loading and wet clutch operation. Using car oil in a motorcycle can cause issues such as clutch slip or accelerated gear wear.

The best practice is to use the oil grade recommended by the manufacturer. In racing, engineers often use thinner oils to reduce friction and mechanical drag. For example, the HRC Fireblade race bike uses a specially formulated Motul 0W-30 that gives an estimated extra 3-4bhp through reduced internal resistance.

5100
7100
MOTUL
MOTUL

Both multigrades, but the 7100 is fully synthetic

[The best tyres for...]

Proper-mile jollies

Bridgestone T33

£290 pair

bridgestone.co.uk

» The T32 sports-touring rubber has been a fine do-it-all tyre fitment. Until you get to around 4000 miles, that is, when you may find that the front has worn prematurely, nixing the decent hot, cold and wet grip you were enjoying. With the new T33, Bridgestone somewhat unusually claim no performance advantage over its predecessor; however, their big boast is a 47 per cent increase in lifespan. We fitted three sets to our group test bikes (see page 72), covered 1200 miles, and were as happy as a porker rolling in slop with the all-round performance. The Tracer was then nabbed for a round trip to Slovenia, pushing it right up to that 4000-mile hurdle. Both tyres were still in fine shape, with just a hint of squaring at the rear from many high-speed autoroute miles, which is fair enough. We'd call it problem solved. **CN**

[**New rider**]

‘Absolutely epic evening’

Fresh new A2 licence in his pocket, **Ed Armitage** heads out for his first proper ride with dad Mike

This has been a long time coming. It’s at least 18 months since me and the old man have been on a ride together, back when I had my 125, and having flown through my test with Honda’s Safety Training (honda.co.uk/engineroom/honda-school-of-motorcycling) I can’t wait for us to get back out – but this time on, well, a proper bike.

The Peak District is the obvious choice. The scenery is brilliant, there are some great roads, and it’s less than an hour and a half from home – distant enough to feel like a decent ride, not so far that it’s a slog. On a glorious Tuesday like this, it’ll be perfect.

Our route north-west takes us mostly on main roads, enduring the bustle of afternoon rush hour

Much better than watching someone else on TikTok

‘A battered sausage and a Dr Pepper chaser’ traffic. I'm riding a Honda CB500 Hornet just like the bike I was trained on, and it sits smoothly and comfortably on the dual-carriageway A50. We thread up the A515 to Ashbourne and head west on the A52 towards Leek and into the Staffordshire Moorlands, before taking the B5053 towards the Manifold Valley and Longnor.

It's a road neither of us knows, and it's proper. We're in the wonderful evening golden hour where the traffic has all disappeared, and the flowing corners, tight turns and cascading crests carry us through mesmerising views of this amazing landscape. At low speed the 500 is chirpy and agile, before pulling strongly out of corners, and gives me loads of confidence on faster bits. The old boy is on *Bike*'s long-term test BMW S1000R and it feels great sweeping along together. Taking the road to Crowdecote and carving up the beautiful hairpin bends out of the valley feels brilliant, as does then sweeping our way along the B5055 to Bakewell.

We turn south and roll into Matlock Bath accompanied by the twin-cylinder 500's surprising and pleasingly deep rumble. It's just a regular Tuesday evening but there are loads of bikes. We shovel down chips while gawping at a long line of machines that stretches the length of the main road. The best part is seeing the enormous number of younger riders, on a catalogue of different bikes. It's very encouraging.

After a battered sausage in the sun and a Dr Pepper chaser, it's the back roads to Derby then a sunset scamper home. What an absolutely epic evening with the old man. And he paid for the chips, too.

Wiping greasy fingers on his neck tube

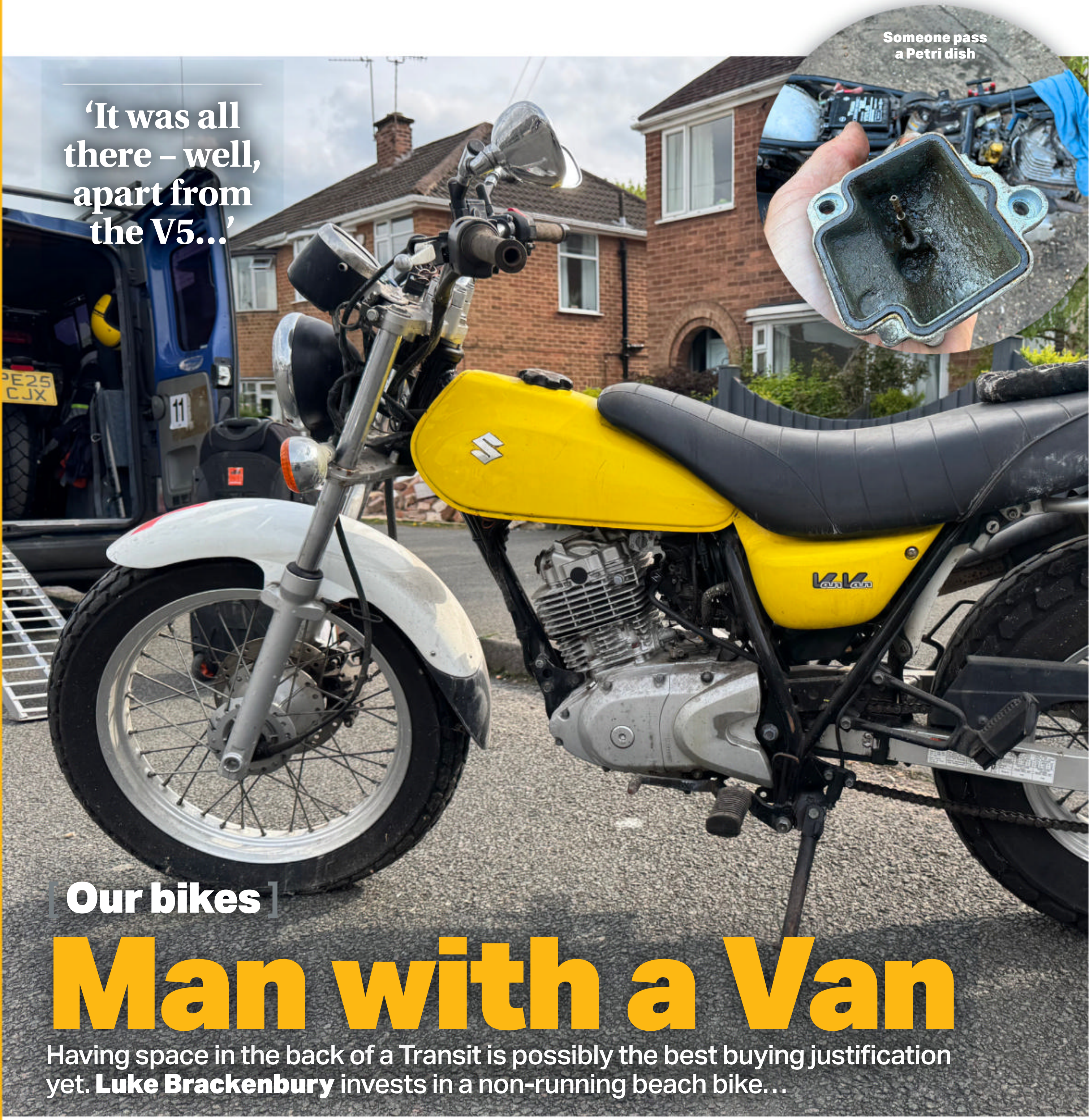
They say nature is good for your mental health. We can confirm

Dad's view…

» Carrying either of my boys on the pillion always brought joy when they were younger, and bimbling about on 50s and 125s with them has been great. But being able to go further afield and head to proper destinations moves things on again.

No worries with Ed being on 'just' an A2 licence, either. These days 47bhp doesn't sound much, but the £6299 CB500 Hornet is neatly packaged and a trim 188kg, and there's ample performance. I'm on our S1000R Sport and riding as I usually do, and at no point does it feel like I've brought a machine gun to a water pistol fight.

Love the Honda's marker lights too – the indicators have an orange glow all the time, and the bike's easy to spot in low evening light. Unlike the BMW's combined brake lights and winkers – Ed nearly misses me indicating on several occasions…



Someone pass a Petri dish

> 'It was all there – well, apart from the V5...'

[**Our bikes**]

Man with a Van

Having space in the back of a Transit is possibly the best buying justification yet. **Luke Brackenbury** invests in a non-running beach bike...

"I've got a half empty van and a 170-mile cross-country drive back home tomorrow. Let's see if we can find me a bike to put in it.' These are the words I typed to our 'small-capacity bike' chat group on WhatsApp one evening last month. Knowing I was ahead of a bout of insomnia, I felt confident a new project could be unearthed on Facebook and collected on the jaunt home.

I desired a Japanese two-stroke scooter and set myself a pride-preserving maximum budget of £350. Alas, my eyelids became too heavy before any deals were done.

With its morning alarm sounding, my phone also revealed a message about a Suzuki RV125 VanVan in Leicester. Listed for a snip-like £250, the 2007 carb-fed model was listed as spares or repairs. However, I've always fancied one – especially in the glorious yellow – and it looked too good for the money. Or too good for my willpower.

Trouble was that the Marketplace listing said it was a 'pending' sale. Ever the optimist, I sent the seller a message and proclaimed I was genuine and could collect today. Cash waiting. The seller said she'd let me know, and I waited...

Just as I began what I thought would be a long drive with unfilled van space and served with an extra portion of sadness, the seller messaged to say she'd been offered £350 but didn't like the sound of the person. This seemed slightly curious as they were flogging a spares or repairs bike, not a beloved family pet, but the good news was that if I matched it the RV125 would be mine. Haggling started. We agreed £300 and off I went.

Presented outside a charming semi-detached was a charming little bike that had spent the past seven years stored in a damp shed with fuel in and the tap positioned 'on'. The filler cap was seized shut, but I was sure the tank wasn't rotting through. It was all there – well, apart from the V5 (which thankfully was found later...) – and so a deal was done with the wife of the

'Assembly is the reverse of disassembly'

Wheeled out for collection. Looks okay from here...

owner, who was clearly fed up with the silly yellow Suzuki being in the way.

Back home and presented with a remarkably sludgy float bowl, I order a new fuel tap (£13 delivered) and ready myself for some sprucing. I reckon there's a weekend's work to get it back running and a small parts list.

These are good

Price, general condition, colour

These less so

Rusty tank, rusty other bits, doesn't run

These need doing

Carb strip, tank clean, make it go ***LB***

[Our bikes]

'I've made a hapless Suzuki purchase too'

John Westlake ignores his own advice, wades in with both feet and snaps up a classic 250 trailie

Regular readers may remember me banging on about a traumatic and ultimately futile attempt to do a long-distance trial on a CFMoto 450 (March issue). Several litres of Ibuprofen gel later, I decide that to successfully complete one of these weirdly addictive 36-hour painfests, I have two choices: a) become much better off-road, or b) buy a lighter bike. Obviously, I choose b).

With a budget of £2000, I set forth unto the internet. Facebook Marketplace offers dozens of stolen CRFs and WRs. MCN Bikes for Sale tempts me with legit CRF300s that I can't afford and eBay has everything from repainted KLR250s to overpriced Yamaha XT225 Serows. And then I see a French import 1986 Suzuki DR250 for £2500 that the owner claims has only done 1200 miles from new. A bit of research shows that DR250s weigh 118kg. Perfect. Off I go for a look.

I should say at this point that I am awful at buying motorcycles. Despite knowing exactly what I'm meant to do – remain calm, assess faults, appear vaguely disinterested, and so on – if the bike looks half decent I fall instantly and transparently in love and proceed to overlook glaring faults. I do it every time and it's really annoying.

And it happens again. The bike itself is in decent nick and the 1200-mile claim looks plausible – the handlebar grips and pegs are barely worn and a quick ride up and down the owner's lane proves it has plenty of compression and feels fit. I can feel the excitement wave washing over me.

Then the owner lets slip that he hasn't actually registered it or put it through its MOT as his advert claimed. And he has no proof he owns it. Obviously, I should walk away. Doesn't even cross my mind – I offer him £2200 and he accepts.

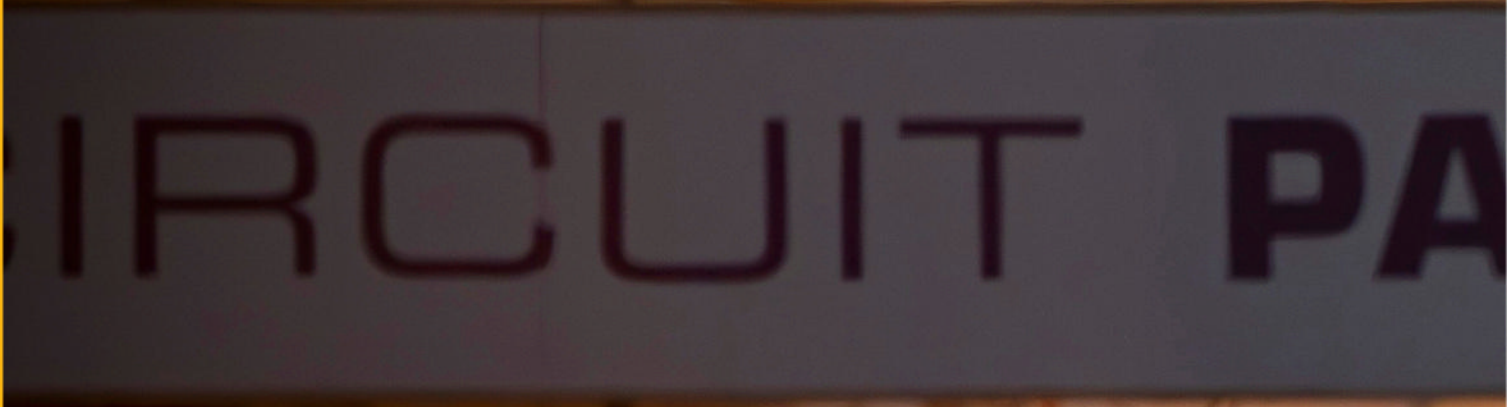
Three months of aggravating bureaucracy later and I think I've got away with it – the DR is registered and MOT'd just in time for the Land's End trial. Find out if either of us survive next month. ***JW***

The first job: adjust the preload. That's shock out...

[Racing]

‘It’s not as bad as it looks…’

Team Bike go to Paul Ricard for a four-hour race, pop the Honda RC30 on pole… and watch it go up in smoke. Team boss **Ian Martin** reports



James Westmoreland
Dan Burnham
brembo
howardleesracing

On the pace? Oh yes

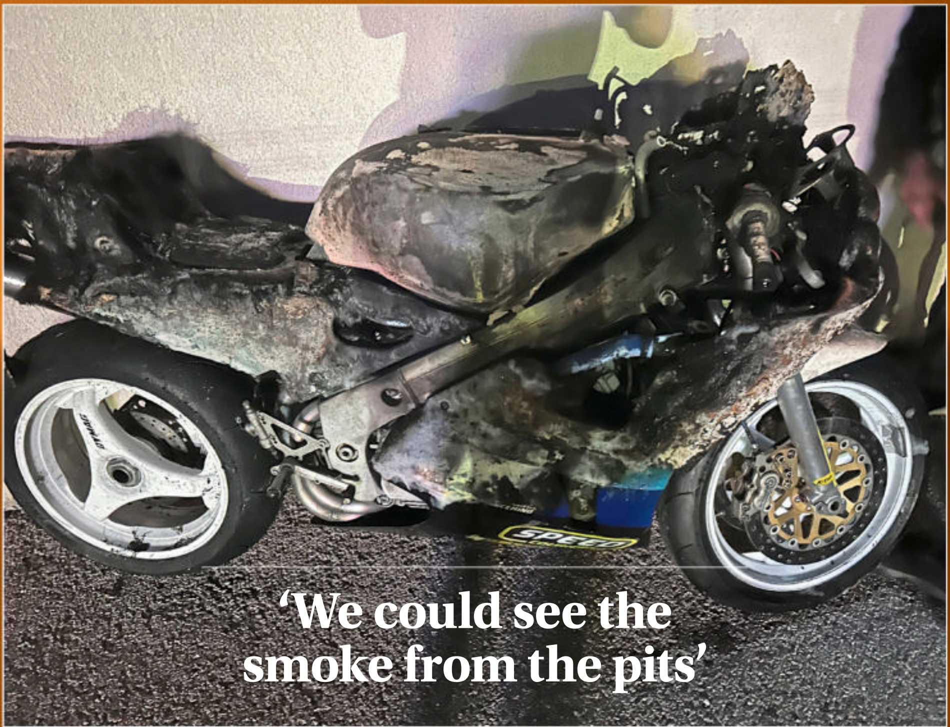
« We arrived with two near identical RC30s, both with big-bore 840cc motors. Dan and James went out together in practice and swapped bikes for the next session. Both ran perfectly, so we chose the slightly quicker number one bike. James did a 2m 17s lap in qualifying – pole in class, six seconds quicker than second – and eighth on the grid with only 1000cc superbikes ahead of us.

Not just fast riders

» James started and immediately got into a groove. The bike sounded awesome down the start/finish straight. We had a 30s lead when we pitted after 50 mins. The team did a usual slick refuelling, and when Dan crossed the start line after his first lap our lead was 1m 28s. We gained nearly a full minute in one pit stop.

That won't polish out…

» Dan put in great laps for 35 mins, increasing our lead. Then with a couple of laps until the next pit stop we saw a huge black smoke cloud coming from the first corner and the safety cars went out… and I saw Dan hadn't gone through the first timing split. I knew the smoke must be from my bike. Dan made it back to the pits absolutely gutted – he'd high-sided at the first corner and the bike must have hit a kerb and burst into flames. The marshals wouldn't go near it, I guess in case it exploded, and they waited for the fire truck to arrive and put it out. I nearly cried when I saw what they dragged off the trailer.



'We could see the smoke from the pits'

Onwards and upwards

» We got the RC30 back to our pit garage and started to strip it down, and found that luckily it wasn't as bad as it looked – we had lost the wiring loom, clocks and all the bodywork, but the chassis, engine and carbs had survived (although were heavily blackened with soot). Our next European race is the Spa 6 Hours against modern bikes, with Casey O'Gorman and a teammate yet to be announced. The spare bike can be used for that, although I hope to have the fire-damaged one rebuilt by then. Steve at GT Performance Engineering has managed to source some genuine oversize RC30 piston kits so we're also building a race 750 motor that will be eligible for the CRMC superbike class against Ducati 916s and Kawasaki ZXR750s. Hopefully we can get it built and fitted into our ex-Roland Brown chassis before the big Donington Park classic meeting on 3-4 August. Come along, see (and hear) the RC in action, and say hi. It's a great event.

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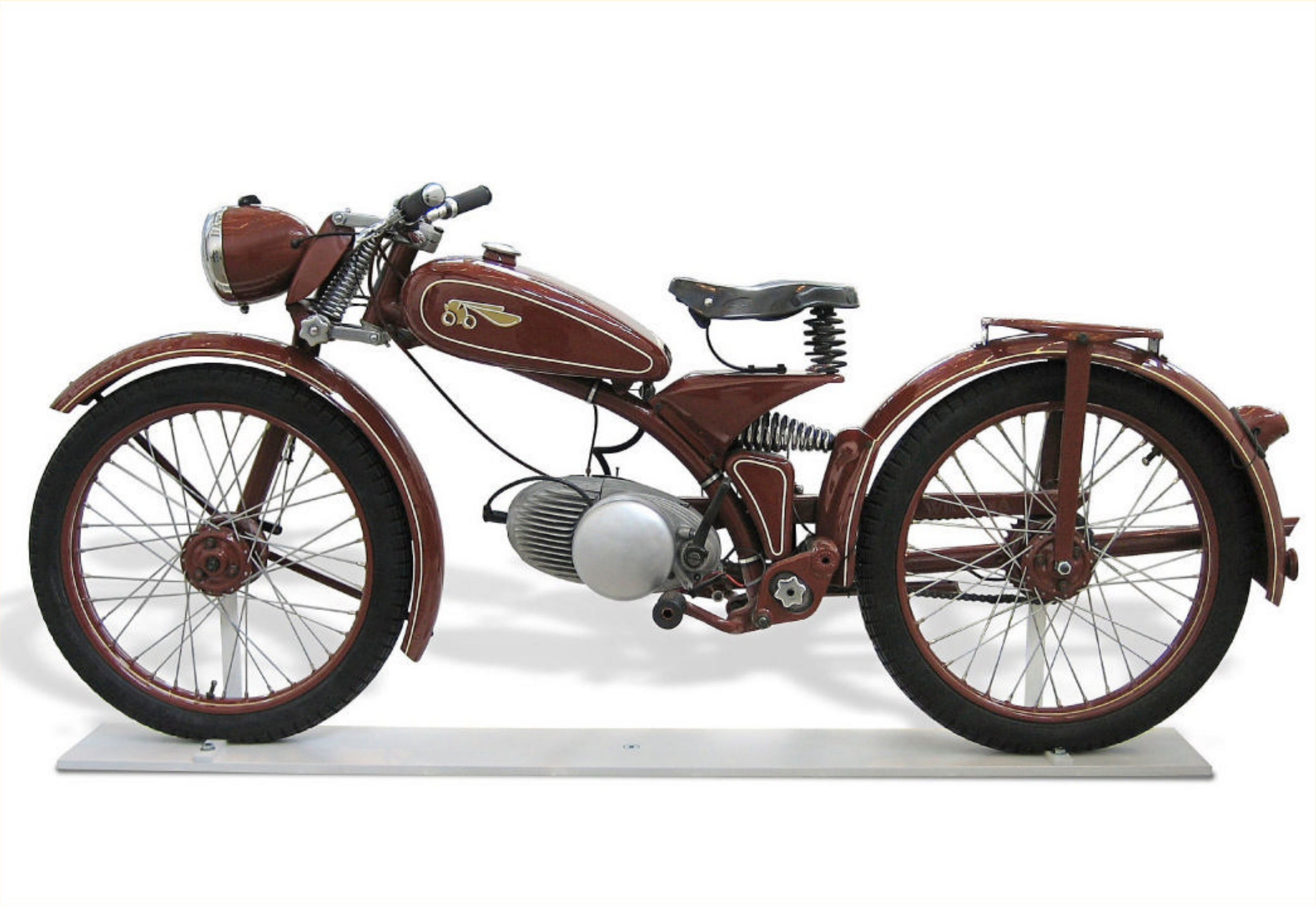

[Ahead of its time]

1948 Riedel Imme

Single-sided front and rear suspension almost 80 years ago? Yes – but that's only a part of it. This groundbreaking two-stroke should have been a revolution…

War. What is it good for? Absolutely nothing. So sung Edwin Starr in his 1970 take of a Temptations song. Nothing changes. But shortages of materials brought about by war can often produce splendid lateral thinking.

Norbert Riedel designed a flat twin two-stroke motor for starting Nazi jet turbine engines. It was necessarily compact and highly effective. By 1948 he had set up a factory in Immenstadt, Bavaria, producing arguably the cleverest small two-stroke motorcycle of all time. Clever, but with one fatal flaw.

The Imme (bee) had so much smart thinking rolled into it. Employing one size (40mm) of seamless steel tube, Riedel constructed a front end, a frame, and a single-sided swingarm doubling as the exhaust. The frame was of monoshock design, the engine a very stylised two-stroke single.

To say he started with a clean sheet of paper would be doing his thought process an insulting disservice. His economical use of scarce materials was jaw-dropping – it makes today's 'budget' parallel twins that share engine and frame look lavish.

Let's begin with the dual-purpose swingarm/exhaust. The engine was attached to the swingarm, now common practice with scooters. The exhaust port emptied into the swingarm, terminating in a natty wee fishtail. The rear mudguard worked the shock. The single-sided front suspension was a girder-style system. Front and rear wheels were interchangeable, and a spare could be bolted to the open side of the rear wheel.

Power was provided by a 99cc engine of 47 x 52mm bore and stroke. The head and barrel were a one-piece casting, and the oval engine/three-speed gearbox made 4.5bhp at 5800rpm. A big number for the time. But it didn't produce it for long. In his quest to be as miserly as possible with materials, Riedel designed a one-bearing crankshaft. One main bearing with the big end and con rod wafting about in the crankcase unsupported at one end.

He was building 500 machines a month by 1949, but warranty claims were flooding in for crankshaft failures. A redesign to a two-bearing crank was swiftly undertaken, but the financial damage had been done and receivers were called in. Production ceased in 1950. Ten thousand machines had been sold.

Despite the overambitious and eminently avoidable bottom end disaster that did for the Imme, this 50mph, 150mpg tiddler remains the most far-sighted of any small-capacity machine. Never mind one conceived and executed in the bleak austerity of a post-war industrial landscape. ***Mark Graham***

PIC: OKURMIS, WIKIMEDIA

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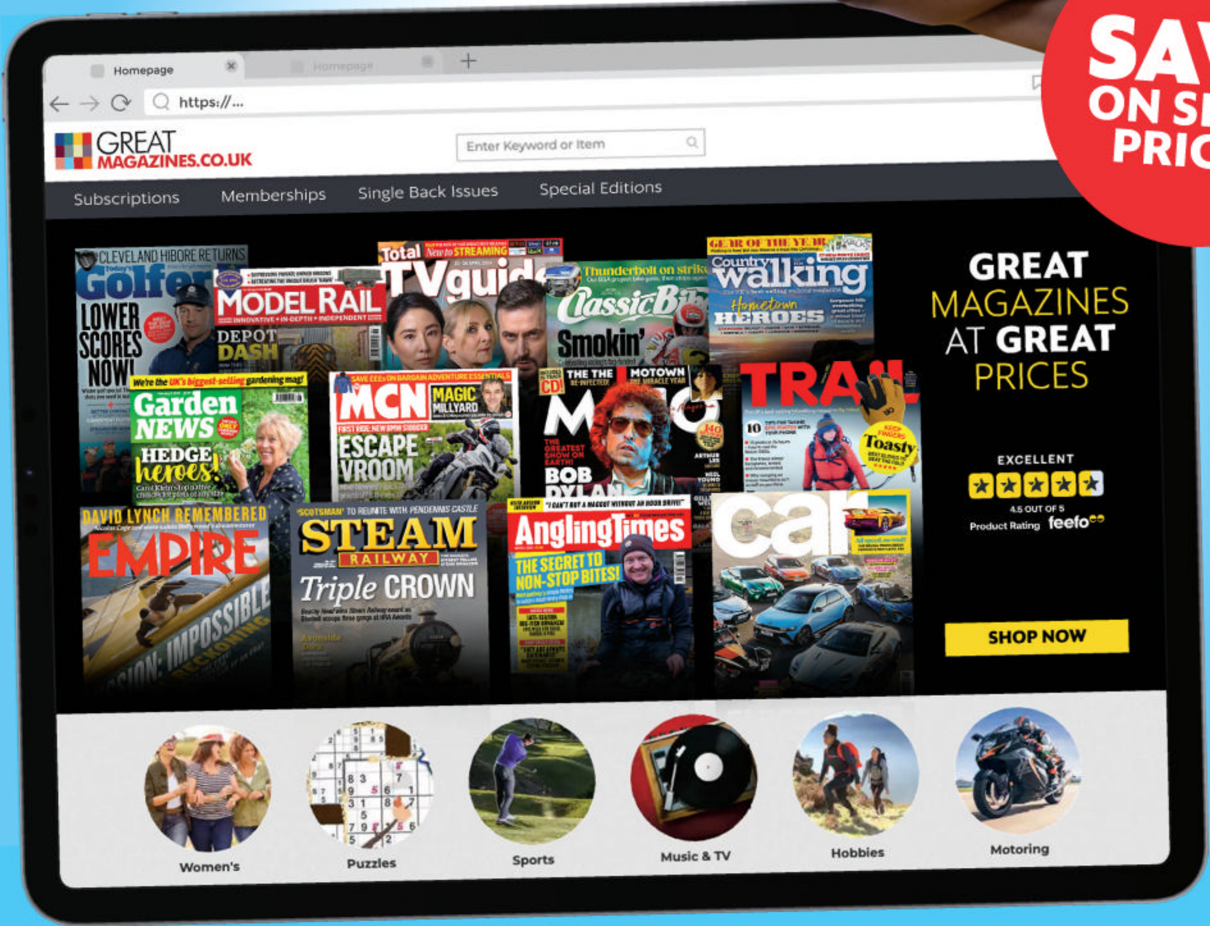

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